

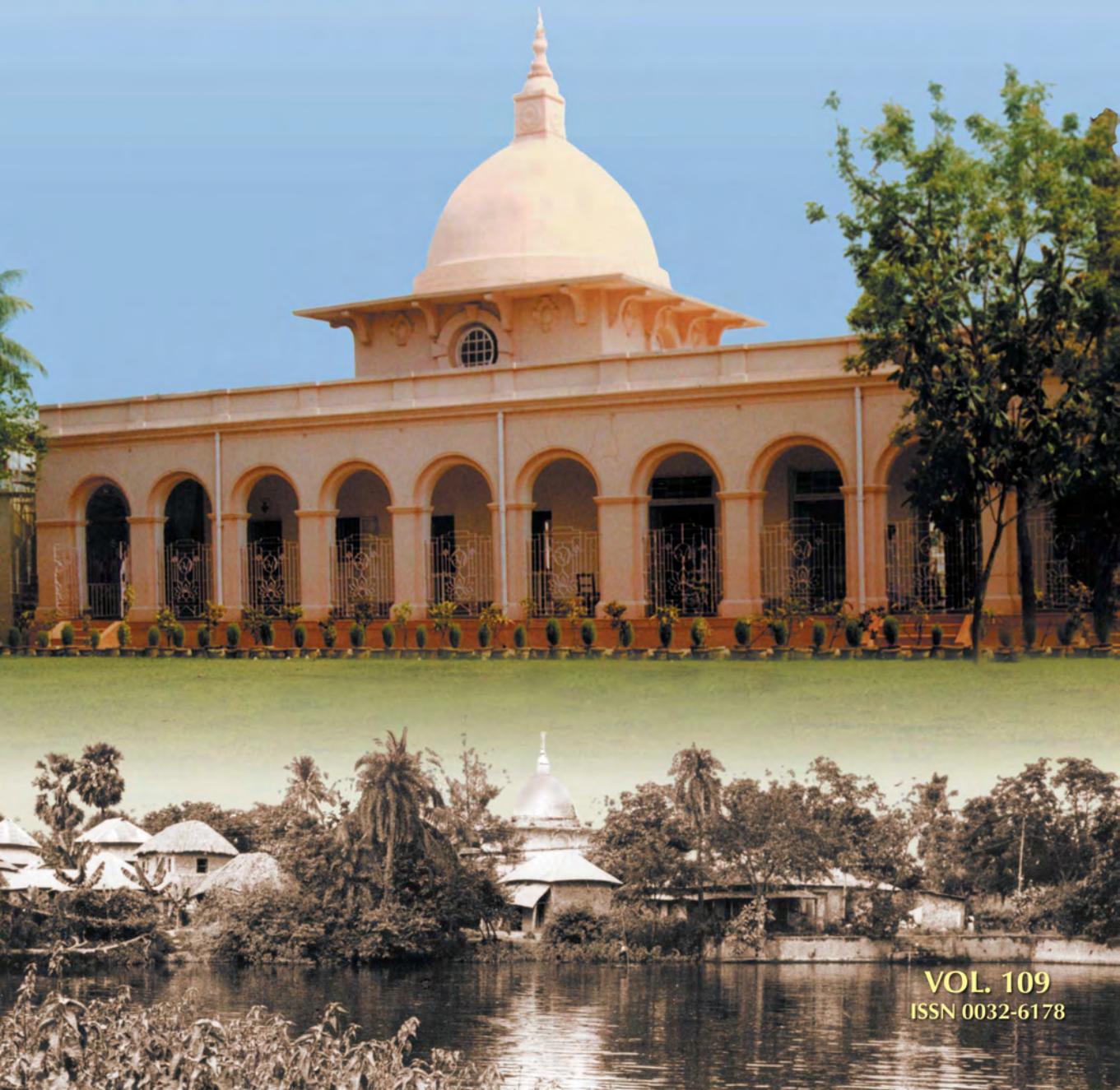
PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

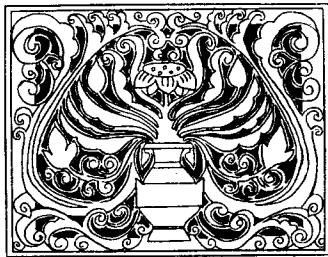
A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Cover: Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati seen today and a period photograph in the foreground. Mother was born in this sanctified village for the good of all Her children in 1853.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निवोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 109

OCTOBER 2004

No. 10

Traditional Wisdom

WAYS OF THE MIND

मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः ।
बन्धाय विषयासक्तं मुक्तं निर्विषयं स्मृतम् ॥

The mind alone is the cause of bondage and freedom. When associated with sense objects it leads to bondage; when dissociated from them it leads to liberation.
(*Amritabindu Upanishad*, 2)

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसर्भं मनः ॥

The turbulent senses violently carry away the mind of even a wise man striving for perfection. (*Bhagavadgita*, 2.60)

The mind is everything. The attraction for the wife is of one kind and the affection for the child is of quite a different nature. On one side is one's wife and on another side is the child. One caresses both, but moved by quite different impulses.

Bondage is of the mind; freedom too is of the mind. If you say, 'I am a free soul. I am a son of God! Who can bind me?' free you shall be. If one is bitten by a snake and can say with all the force of will and faith, 'There is no venom, there is no venom,' one will surely get rid of the venom. (Sri Ramakrishna)

The natural tendency of the mind is to run this way or that. Through japa it is directed to God. (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi)

We should put our minds on things; they should not draw our minds to them. We are usually forced to concentrate. Our minds are forced to become fixed upon different things by an attraction in them which we cannot resist. To control the mind, to place it just where we want it, requires special training. It cannot be done in any other way. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6.39)

❖ This Month ❖

Turning over a New Leaf, this month's editorial, discusses the struggle involved in bettering ourselves and some helps on the way.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features (1) 'Destiny and Self-exertion', an article by Swami Prakashanandaji and (2) some clippings from 'News and Miscellanies'.

Reflections on the Bhagavadgita is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 11 to 19 of the tenth chapter of the *Gita*.

The Inspiration That Was Swami Vivekananda is an edited transcript of a talk by Swami Swahanandaji at the public meeting at Belur Math on Swami Vivekananda's birthday in 2004. In this thought-provoking talk the author discusses the inspirational quality of Swamiji's lectures, service of God in man, the importance of asserting the Self, and the positive tone and universality of Swamiji's message. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is a former editor of *Vedanta Kesari* and heads the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

'Knowledge is inherent in man; no knowledge comes from outside,' said Swamiji. In his incisive article **Reflections on Knowledge**, Swami Nityasthanandaji discusses how this definition applies to empirical knowledge as well. A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is editor of *Viveka Prabha*, the Order's Kannada organ, published from Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore.

Holy Mother's all-embracing mother-heart, her tranquil personality that concealed a burning spirituality within, her significant

role in nurturing the Ramakrishna Mission—Swami Tathagatanandaji captures all this in his article **Motherhood of God**. The author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and heads the Vedanta Society of New York.

A Hymn to the Divine Person of Dakshinamurti is a free verse in Sanskrit on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Mukhyanandaji. Composed in the manner of Sri Shankaracharya's well-known *Sri Dakshinamurti Stotra*, along with an English translation, the verse brings out some unique features of Sri Ramakrishna's life. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is a deep thinker and has many books and articles to his credit.

The Power of Faith by Pravrajika Sevapranaji is comprehensive survey of the different dimensions of faith: fundamentals to faith, shraddhā, faith inspired by realization, faith in the guru, faith in ourselves, faith and concentration, faith and self-surrender—to mention a few. A regular contributor to this journal, the author is a nun and honorary worker at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi.

Parabrahma Upaniṣad is the fourth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives features some more inspiring incidents from the life of Giriravar, who believed that whatever God does is for our own good.

Turning over a New Leaf

EDITORIAL

Four monks decided to observe silence for a month. They started out well enough, but after the first day one monk said, 'I wonder if I locked the door of my cell at the monastery before we set out.' Another monk said, 'You fool! We decided to keep silence for a month and now you have broken it.' A third monk said, 'What about you? You have broken it too!' Said the fourth, 'Thank God, I'm the only one who hasn't spoken yet.'¹

Our Predicament

The story lends itself to some reflection. Hardly does our mind let us carry out our intentions. More often than not, our resolutions remain as resolutions. Not only being unable to live up to our pious intentions, we sometimes act in an entirely opposite way, despite knowing that such a course of action will be detrimental to us. Knowing what was right but unable to follow it, and knowing what was wrong but unable to desist from it was Duryodhana's predicament. His inherent wickedness coupled with the evil designs of his vicious uncle made him what he was. However, he is not alone in his predicament; there is a streak of it in every one of us.

How a worldly man continues to be worldly in spite of himself, Sri Ramakrishna describes graphically and forcefully:

The bound creatures, entangled in worldliness, will not come to their senses at all. They suffer so much agony, they face so many dangers, and yet they will not wake up.

The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more the blood gushes from its mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants and will never give them up. The man of worldly nature suffers so much sorrow and affliction, but he forgets it all in a few days and begins his old life over again. ...

Again, a worldly man is like a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to the world—that the world is like a hog plum, only stone and skin—but still he cannot give it up and turn his mind to God.²

Yes, our mind does not easily let us turn over a new leaf. For the most part, it acts as our enemy. Can we ever tame this unruly mind? Vedanta says yes, it is possible, but it needs effort: there is neither a short cut here nor an instant result. It calls for protracted struggle, sometimes enough to unnerve the bravest of us. But yes, the rewards are also commensurate with the struggle: control over the mind implies more and more identity with our real Self, the Atman, the source of eternal Being, Knowledge and Bliss. A study of how our mind works will help us in training our mind and bettering ourselves.

Outward Orientation of the Mind

Our mind and the senses are constitutionally outward-oriented. In the words of the *Katha Upanishad*, 'God inflicted an injury on the sense organs by creating them with outgoing tendencies; therefore one perceives only external objects with them, and not the inner Self.'³ In our daily activities, we remain mostly identified with our mind. That we are different from it sounds to be just a pet theory for most of us.

In any perception, the 'I'—our pure Self, the Atman—gets attached to mind, which gets attached to a sense organ, which in turn comes in contact with its sense object. Since the mind, the inner organ, is involved in all perceptions by connecting itself with any of the sense organs—ears, skin, eyes, tongue or nose—it is

called the chief of all organs.⁴ Outward-oriented, the sense organs are always eager to come in contact with their respective sense objects, and drag us and the mind along with them. Even a wise man struggling for perfection is not exempt from this pull of the senses, says Sri Krishna.⁵

What Impels Us to Action

How we act, how we react to situations, the circumstances we find ourselves in—in short, what we are at any time is determined by ourselves, by our samskaras. Anything we do or think leaves an impression (samskara) in the mind. The impression gets strengthened with every repetition of the act or thought. Any desire arising in our mind to enjoy an object is triggered by the samskaras corresponding to its earlier enjoyments. We are suddenly caught off our guard: the mind becomes one with the desire, hooks itself to the sense organs and objects, and drags us towards the object of enjoyment.

True Freedom

When we are able to satisfy a desire without obstruction, we feel how *free* we are. True, there is an element of freedom there, but it does not belong to *us*, but to the mind and the senses: they have the freedom to drag us wherever they want. We fail to understand this because of our total identification with the mind. True freedom, however, is not freedom *for* the senses but freedom *from* (the hold of) the senses. When we understand this, we become aware that we were taken for a ride by the senses and the mind, and that our so-called freedom is not something to make a song about.

Getting down to Brass Tacks

True superiority, it is said, consists in not being superior to others, but being superior to our former selves. Turning over a new leaf is indeed difficult, for it entails mind discipline. Like water and electricity, the mind too fol-

lows the line of least resistance: the senses-objects chain. The mind rebels only when this least resistant line is threatened. But that is precisely what mind discipline does: weaning the mind off from the hold of the senses. Any amount of reading self-development books or hearing words of wisdom is of no avail unless we decide to work on ourselves with patience and persistence. 'No rules for success will work if you don't' cannot be more significant than here. Now we discuss some aids on the path to bettering ourselves.

A strong determination to change: An abiding faith in oneself and a resolute mindset are a prerequisite to turning over a new leaf. An old man was on a pilgrimage to a Himalayan shrine in the bitter cold of winter, when it began to rain. An innkeeper asked him, 'How will you ever get there in this kind of weather, my good man?' The old man answered cheerfully, 'My heart got there first, so it's easy for the rest of me to follow.' The hereditary farmer in Sri Ramakrishna's parable is another case in point. He doesn't give up farming even though he doesn't get any crop in a year of drought.⁶ Even so, a man endowed with determination does not give up easily even if he fails in his attempts at change. Swami Vivekananda wrote to his disciple Goodwin, 'The road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed, no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.'⁷

Being alert about our thoughts: We saw that our actions and thoughts leave their impressions on the mind. And since thoughts impel us to actions, we cannot be too careful about what we think. Though it is certainly helpful to know what goes on in our mind by witnessing its functions, it is more useful to proactively think wholesome thoughts, not letting the mind brood over undesirable things. Swami ji's words offer great hope and consolation: 'The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, thought,

and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever.' (2.225) Elsewhere Swamiji compares truth to 'a corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls—in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must.' (5.71) Consciously thinking about our higher nature and ordering our actions accordingly is thus an indispensable means to self-culture. In fact, only wholesome thoughts can counteract bad impressions.

Entering into a contract with God: Fasts, vigils and taking vows are some well-known means to strengthen will power. To the extent our will becomes strong, we are able to detach ourselves from our unruly mind and forge ahead on the path to perfection. External rituals remain just mechanical and lifeless observances if they don't strengthen our will as a sequel. Stressing the importance of a strong resolve, Sri Ramakrishna says:

Suppose a man becomes pure by chanting the holy name of God, but immediately afterwards commits many sins. *He has no strength of mind. He doesn't take a vow not to repeat his sins.* A bath in the Ganges undoubtedly absolves one of all sins; but what does that avail? They say that the sins perch on the trees along the bank of the Ganges. No sooner does the man come back from the holy waters than the old sins jump on his shoulders from the trees. ... The same old sins take possession of him again. He is hardly out of the water before they fall upon him.⁸ (*Emphasis added*)

Besides asking his devotees to have faith in God's name, Sri Ramakrishna advised them to enter into a contract, as it were, with God: 'One should have such faith as to be able to say, "What? I have taken the name of God; how can I be a sinner?" God is our Father and Mother. Tell Him, "O Lord, I have committed sins, but I won't repeat them." Chant His name and purify your body and mind. Purify your

tongue by singing God's holy name.'⁹ (*Emphasis added*)

Association with the wise: Sri Ramakrishna often prescribed holy company as a potent cure for *bhavaroga*, the disease of worldliness.

Regularity in prayer and meditation: Holy Mother stressed regular japa and meditation in the mornings and evenings, for that would keep tabs on the mind on a daily basis and sharpen our discrimination.

* * *

Turning over a new leaf involves mind discipline and long and patient struggle. The struggle is challenging and at times unnerving, but only we human beings can struggle and become great despite failures and mistakes. The 'voice without a form' is ready to inspire us 'until the world shall know that it is one with God': 'Never mind failures; they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life, these failures. ... Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow—never a man. So never mind these failures, these little backslidings; hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.'¹⁰ *

References

1. Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Parishad, 1989), 152.
2. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 165.
3. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
4. 'Indriyāñānī manaścāsmi; Among sense organs I am the mind.' —*Bhagavadgita*, 10.22.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.60.
6. *Gospel*, 238.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.383.
8. *Gospel*, 190.
9. *Ibid.*, 159.
10. CW, 2.152

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

October 1904

Destiny and Self-exertion

Our waking consciousness is only a part of our whole mind, which has two other planes, the subconscious and the superconscious. In dream functions the subconscious mind, when our past impressions come up and appear like real things; the superconscious state is known by the yogis.

Whatever we think or do is not lost; though apparently non-existent, it remains in the subconscious mind and then wakes up in the conscious plane. After repeated conscious acts we acquire a tendency. Each habit is a resultant of one class of impressions: suppose we read fiction or go to a certain place or talk or play every day, after a few days it becomes a habit, sometimes so strong that we find great difficulty in shaking it off. This resultant of past impressions has been given various names in Hindu scriptures as *daiva* (supernatural), *adrishta* (unseen) or *niyati* (destiny).

When people find it beyond their power to check the course of habit, when they see it impossible to get mastery over their lower nature, when circumstances press hard on them from all sides, they say, 'How powerful is destiny, how irresistible is fate!' The average educated man, unable to ascertain the cause of an event, is prone to ascribe it to the working of a supernatural being. What wonder that the uneducated, bred and nurtured in ignorance and superstition, finding no clue to the source determining the course of their thought and action, would attribute it to a deity endowed with supernatural power? And men are not wanting who invent stories to corroborate popular beliefs and fan the members of superstition into a blazing fire. The priest in every country and in every age is the master-builder of superstition. These keepers of the people's religion are ever ready to pour into the ears of their wards that they are quite at the mercy of the supernatural, and if it is pleased everything will go right. Led by their plausible and tempting words people try to appease the unseen powers with supplications and offerings and support and bribe the priests for welfare.

There is another idea deep-rooted in the heart of a section of our people that *Vidhata Purusha* (the dispenser of fate) determines all about a man's life beforehand, and writes every detail of the same on the forehead of a baby when it is born. Whatever vicissitudes of fortune, whatever adversity or prosperity the child will pass through in its life, is predestined. Even the strongest efforts on its part cannot avert them. The best plan, therefore, is to reconcile oneself to one's fate.

These slavish ideas of *daiva*, predestination, fate and destiny should at once be knocked on the head, and the healthy and vigorous ideas of self-help, self-exertion should be taught and practised. These cramping, weakening and false imaginations have reigned long in our society and sapped its foundation, dragging men down to the level of crawling worms. These notions have got rooted so deep in our hearts that it demands most vigorous efforts to eradicate them. Are not these fancies of helplessness in the hands of *adrishta* quite contrary to the teachings of the *Shruti*, which proclaims with a lion's roar the ideas of fearlessness and faith in the power of soul, urging man to stand on his own legs? The idea of fear and the sacrifice of one's independence at the altar of one's diseased imagination destroy manhood and the sense of responsibility, reducing man to a lifeless machine. Is there a dearth of real troubles in this world that imaginary ones are manufactured for our misery by idle brains? It is well known that the lazy defend their sluggishness by trying to throw all blame and re-

sponsibility on agencies apart from themselves.

The *Yoga Vasishta* denies the existence of a supernatural *daiva* or *adrishta* and declares it to be the resultant of past karma. The *Gita* proclaims with potent voice, 'Let one uplift oneself by self; let not one drag oneself down: for self alone is the friend of oneself and self alone is the enemy of oneself. Self is the friend of oneself for one who has conquered oneself by self, but the unconquered self is inimical like a foe.' (6.5-6)

What a man has done he can undo. It does not behove one to despair or give up hope of success after a little effort. The remedy must be proportionate to the disease. The accumulated impressions of the actions of hundreds of incarnations cannot be undone in a short time. A screw has been driven into a wall by fifty turns; it requires the same number of turns in the opposite direction before it can be taken out. There is infinite power within man—the Self is the store-house of unending strength—before which the strongest habit, the hardest circumstances and the most insurmountable difficulties are bound to give way. It is a blasphemy to deny the power of the soul. By indomitable will, unflinching zeal, dogged pertinacity and tremendous exertions man can conquer everything.

Mark the difference: a Japanese mother teaches her baby absolute fearlessness and independence, while an Indian mother always frightens her child with 'there is a bugaboo standing in the corner.' The result is manifest. Education, an assiduous culture of the sense of responsibility, faith in Soul-power, the spread of the life-giving teachings of the Upanishads and the doctrine of *abhih* (fearlessness) are the real panacea for our social and moral evils. Whatever is weakening should be mercilessly cut away from the body social, and what is strong and invigorating should be taken irrespective of the quarter it comes from.

—Prakashananda

The Hindu community of Masulipatam have founded a temple on an un-sectarian basis and given it the name of 'Vivekananda Mandir' after the great teacher, under whose inspiration they have been working in the cause of the Sanatana Dharma. Instead of any image, 'Om', which is regarded by Hindus of all sects with equal veneration, is worshipped in the temple. *Gita* classes are also held twice a week. The Mandir was opened on the 27th August under the presidency of Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was invited for the purpose. The swami also delivered two lectures there: (1) What is Truth? (2) How to Realize the Truth? On his way back the swami delivered a lecture at Bezwada on 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Teachings'.

The spider has a tremendous appetite, and his gormandizing defies all human competition. A scientist who carefully noted a spider's consumption of food in 24 hours concluded that if the spider were built proportionately to the human scale he would eat at daybreak, approximately, a small alligator, by 7 am a lamb, by 9 am a calf, by 1 o'clock a sheep, and would finish up with a lark pie in which there were 120 birds.

The latest wonder of photography is a machine which is capable of receiving impressions at the rate of 200 a second to 30 or 40 times as fast as the ordinary cinematograph. One of the chief purposes to which this wonderful invention is put is the photographing of insects' wings in motion, by which it is hoped that the problem of flight may at last be solved.

The sound of a bell which can be heard 5,200 ft through the water can be heard through the air only 456 ft.

—from 'News and Miscellanies'

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 10 (*continued*)

11. Out of pure compassion for them, abiding in their hearts, I destroy their darkness born of ignorance, by the effulgent Light of wisdom.

They are always engaged in thinking of Me, who dwell in their pure hearts as the Atman, the true, eternal Self. Out of pure compassion and anxiety about how they may attain bliss, I destroy the darkness of their ignorance by the effulgent Light of wisdom. By the Light of wisdom I remove the illusory knowledge caused by the absence of discrimination. The Light of wisdom is the perception of Truth; I give them that perception. The passionless heart is like a lamp in which burns the oil of divine grace. The air that keeps it burning is the breeze of love that blows between man and God, and the wind from which it is protected is the desire for things perceived by the senses or the mind. The Lord is the divine Light that shines in the heart and illumines the mind from within. That Light must be kept burning by pure devotion, prayer, meditation, chastity, non-attachment, discrimination and other virtues. To such a purified intellectual state, the Spirit reveals itself.

12-13. Arjuna said:

Thou art the supreme Brahman, the supreme Abode and Purity supreme. All the rishis, Devarshi Narada and Asita, Devala and Vyasa, have declared You as the eternal and self-effulgent Purusha, the primeval Deity, birthless and all-pervading; and You Yourself too declare to Me the same (Truth).

There can be no doubt about the truth of all this. I have learned it from the highest sources. All the great sages

Having heard all that has gone before, Arjuna is delighted. He has drunk in every word the Lord has spoken. But he is not yet satisfied. He wants to hear more. It is such a joy to hear the Lord relate His own divine qualities and powers and glories. Yes, Arjuna has read all this in the scriptures; rishis have also told him; but no one can describe them as the Lord does. 'Whatever You have said is true,' says Arjuna. 'I know it. Thou art the Highest of the high, the Greatest, Brahman itself. But I do not always remember it. Help me remember it always. Tell me again, in greater detail, of Your yoga power and divine attributes so that I may see You everywhere, that everything may remind me of You. Tell me that again and again. I love to hear it. How can I see You in the world with which I am in constant contact? I want to get down to the practical side. I am convinced, but what of that? I want to see, feel and realize.' And so Arjuna appeals to Sri Krishna in the next verses.

have taught it and you yourself have declared it. What greater proof do I need? No, Lord, I believe. I believe.' And so Arjuna goes on:

14. O Keshava, I regard all that You tell Me as true. Verily, O Blessed Lord, neither the devas nor the *dānavas* (demigods) know Your manifestation.

Who indeed can know the Lord's manifesta- | tions in all their fullness?

15. O Purusha supreme, O Source of beings, O Lord of beings, O God of gods, O Ruler of the universe, verily, You Yourself know Yourself by Yourself.

O Lord, You are the only instructor about Yourself. Not even Your conditioned nature as the Lord of the universe can

be seen by others. You alone know Yourself, since, O Lord, none else can know You,

16. You should indeed tell me, without reserve, of Your divine attributes by which, filling all these worlds, You exist.

17. How shall I, O Yogi, meditate ever to know You? In what various aspects are You, O Blessed Lord, to be thought of by Me?

This is Arjuna's appeal to Sri Krishna, whom he addresses as Yogi. The Lord is the ideal yogi, possessed of all power and wisdom.

'I have to live in this world,' says Arjuna. That means, 'I have to live the sense life. So even while performing my duties, I want to think of You. That will purify my mind and then at last I may be able to really meditate and realize Your highest form. Teach me, O Krishna, how to live in the world so that everything will remind me of You, that I may go through life never forgetting You. Then I will be safe; the world will not be able to tempt or contaminate me.'

That which Arjuna wants to *acquire*, we find demonstrated in the life of great saints. Everything reminds them of the Lord. We find that throughout Sri Ramakrishna's life even small and insignificant things were occasions for his discourses on God and absorption into samadhi.

The saint Avadhuta had twenty-four gurus, mostly animals and inert things. But all taught him to direct his mind towards God. Once he saw a crane intently watching the water for hours to catch a fish. Then Avadhuta thought, 'How great is the crane. She stands there for hours to gain the object of her desire, never stirring. May I be as patient and self-controlled during the hours of my devotions. That is practical religion. That is what is meant' by sincere life. Thus we grow spiritually, always thoughtful, always endeavouring

to keep God before our mind.

God has created the senses to enjoy the external world. Therefore, our natural tendency is to go outwards through the senses. Our life is going outwards from the centre, which is the Soul. It is only in deep sleep that the senses are gathered up and then the soul rests within itself. And this is also the case in meditation. What is done unconsciously in deep sleep is done consciously during meditation. A rishi of old realized that God could not be found by going outwards through the senses. Then he collected his senses and went inward. He concentrated all his faculties on the heart. And then, he found the great Reality. In meditation he found the great secret.

And there was a Western saint who sang, 'I searched for God with heart-throbs of despair, beneath the ocean's depth, above the vaulted sky. At last I searched myself and found Him there.'

But we are now dealing with another phase of realization. Arjuna is not speaking of meditation, but of the possibility of seeing God in nature. The saint is like an artist. The artist has found something behind sense experience, something behind what the senses offer. He cannot reach it. But through the senses he tries to get near it. Ordinary people are satisfied there, but the artist gets a glimpse beyond. He uses the senses in order to go beyond the senses. He pushes on; he penetrates where the senses cannot go. The external suggests to him the internal. And that is what Arjuna

wants. He wants to be reminded of the Lord through the external, through *that* with which he comes in daily contact, which he cannot avoid. Later on, we will see that Arjuna gets a higher vision. Finding that the external cannot satisfactorily reveal the Reality, the saint goes inward. That is prayer and meditation and discrimination. He realizes that through the senses full vision is not possible. He then retires within himself. And after seeing God within himself in samadhi, he comes out and he sees God everywhere. He reverses the pro-

cess. *First the external covers the Lord, but now the Lord covers the external.* The saint is the perfect artist. He looks through the spiritual eye, the eye of God. And then, everything becomes beautiful, for he sees God through all. Everything is illumined with the glory of God. God is Beauty. And that Beauty he sees everywhere. Arjuna wants to train his mind so that, even thinking of external objects, he may be able to contemplate the Lord in His manifestations. And so he says in the next verse:

18. O Janardana, tell me again in detail of Your yoga power and divine attributes, for I am never satiated in listening to (Your) words of nectar.

And then, being thus earnestly solicited the Lord answers Arjuna and helps him out

of his difficulty.

19. The Blessed Lord said:

O best of the Kurus, I shall speak to you of My principal divine attributes, for there is no end to the vastness of My manifestations.

Gladly does Sri Krishna comply with Arjuna's request. I shall speak to you of My divine attributes. But I shall tell you only the principal ones, for even in a whole lifetime I could not mention them all. There is no end to the vastness of My manifestations.

My power is unlimited. It can never be told. First I will tell you about the Atman. That is the highest, that is My real Being, apart from the conceptions of men—the indwelling Spirit. Listen!

(To be continued)

The Wailing Wall

When former US President Carter visited Jerusalem, Israel's Prime Minister Begin took him to the Wailing Wall. 'O God,' Carter prayed, 'please help the Arabs and Israelis to find peace.'

'Amen,' said Begin.

'And please, God, let the Egyptians and Israelis live in peaceful coexistence.'

'Amen,' said Begin.

'And please tell the Israelis to return to the Arabs all the territories they occupied in the 1967 war.'

'I would like to remind you, Mr President,' said Begin, 'that you are talking to a wall.'

—Free Press Daily, Malaysia

The Inspiration That Was Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI SWAHANANDA

Swami Vivekananda's ideas have been seen through various eyes, and new light has been thrown upon these ideas. In one sense, Swamiji is inexhaustible. In another sense, it can be supported that Swamiji's core message is that man is the Atman, Atman is perfection, and perfection defies all types of limitations.

'I Shall Not Cease to Inspire'

The first thing about Swamiji that strikes me is his importance in inspiring us. His teachings are there of course, but his *life* is also there. He has left behind a sangha, an organization, a circle of devotees, to put into practice the ideas he gave. And a great man is more a principle than a person. But still, to my mind, his most important contribution is the inspiration he creates.

I remember—and this is the experience of many people—that when we were young, there was a Bengali volume, a second volume of Swamiji's letters, which was very inspiring. Now it has been included in the larger compilation, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*. The letters written between 1890 and 1902 are of a more inspiring type, when Swamiji was trying to energize people to do things. Romain Rolland has described Swamiji as 'energy personified, and action was his message to man'. So when you read his books, you get thrilled, as do some of the famous writers and thinkers and singers, but you also feel that inspiration comes in your own life. I was in Madras for more than twelve years in the 1950s and 60s. The president of the Tamil Writers' Association became my friend. And being inspired by us, he began to read the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Early one morning, he came to the Math to meet me. That was not the time

sadhus met people, but still I had to come out. He said, 'Swami, I could not contain myself. Last night I was reading Swamiji till twelve o'clock; then suddenly the inspiration came, by reading his works, that I must *do* something. But what to do at midnight? So I settled with my pen and wrote two stories in one night.' The reason he was so impressed was that for the previous two years he could not write a book or any stories for that matter, because he was constructing a building. That building took up all his energies, all his attention. There was no creativity left in him to write anything. So that is the important idea: in whatever way you are going, Swamiji's inspiration can help you in that particular way. Not that you will necessarily turn traditionally spiritual overnight, but you will be inspired, and inspired things will happen. And that, according to Swamiji, is the real fulfilment of life: to manifest the perfection we have in us. How it is manifested and how much it is manifested, only by that will it be judged whether our life is successful or not.

So that is the major idea: Swamiji is an inspirer of people, especially young people. When we remember his inspiring words, we feel energized, enthused; all the blood will be boiling, as it were, to do something. What things will come? Much will be determined by the composition of our mind. Inspiration doesn't always express itself in the same way. We have the classical experience of the *Ramayana* stories. Three brothers, Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, practised hard austerities. That was considered to be the major method by which strength, power and wisdom were acquired. Because Ravana was of the rajasic type, his mental composition was of rajoguna. He became a king and wielded

power in the three worlds, but he also became a tyrant. Kumbhakarna was a lazy man, so by his tapasya his laziness increased, though it was probably a covetable laziness to some extent. He could alternately sleep for six months and eat for six months! We may smile at this, but remember, eighty per cent of our activities centre around these two: having good sleep and good food—to attain our security in these two. Twenty per cent of our activities may involve something more than these two things. Vibhishana was of the sattvic type and had spiritual attainment, realization of God. The idea is that spirituality can give you inspiration, but your mental composition must be all right.

Need for Purification of Mind

Along with receiving inspiration, it is very important to purify our minds as much as possible. The method of achieving purification is contemplation of the pure. The lives of

Along with receiving inspiration, it is very important to purify our minds as much as possible. The method of achieving purification is contemplation of the pure. The lives of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji and others can purify us, but it is also important to do some unselfish action.

Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji and others can purify us, but it is also important to do some unselfish action. Swamiji's major prescription is service. He used to say that renunciation and service are the national ideals of India. Why *national* ideals, these are the ideals of the whole world.

I was at one time the editor of the *Vedanta Kesari* in Madras. My predecessor was Swami Budhananda, who was a good thinker. At one time he filled up the journal with quotations he had collected for two years—quotations from the *Mahabharata* and other books—to

prove that a householder is a greater renuncier than a sannyasin. Why? If I am a monk and I have got a headache, I go to sleep. I don't care for the world. But if I am a mother and my child comes home, in spite of my headache, in spite of my illness, I shall have to get up and look after the child. Now, unconsciously that mother has acquired the quality of a yogi: self-control, control of the emotions and demands of the body, working for others.

True Worship

Swamiji's prescription is to purify yourself, and then, to be useful to society, to work for others. Spiritual work is all right, but if you work for others, at least something substantial will remain. When Swamiji went to Rameswaram, he said in his lecture in the Shiva temple that if we go to the temple with fruits and flowers but forget that God is there, the whole thing is a waste. Of course, some result will be there inasmuch as it is a discipline; it is not a

hundred per cent waste, but still a waste. But if we go to a sick man and give a little medicine, or go to an ignorant man and give a little knowledge, if we remember God is in him, we get the full benefit of worship. But even if we forget the God in him, still, our action has a social benefit. It involves the practice of unselfishness. The more unselfishness increases, the more will purity come. Impurity is self-consideration. In all our affairs we normally equate things from our own standpoint. Unselfishness is ignoring oneself.

I remember one thinker's very beautiful definition of humility. We know what humility is, but his was a very unique way of explaining it: humility is the capacity to praise your adversary—very difficult indeed! To praise one's adversary, to say that he has got good qualities, is wonderful. It requires us to think a little deeper. When we can do this, it

means that complete egolessness has come. We are then able to appreciate goodness elsewhere, or find goodness in somebody else.

Ātma-vikāsa

Swamiji's idea is that we will be much more successful if we can purify ourselves, make the mind ready for results, ready for the manifestation of our hidden powers. As Vedantists we should believe that nothing comes from outside. All the capacities are already within. They are to be brought out. Instead of self-development, our word is *ātma-vikāsa*, self-manifestation. The Atman is all perfect, but it manifests itself. Unknown areas are there in human nature in which the Spirit can manifest. In the world's oldest book, the *Rig Veda*, it is said that God covered the entire universe, but transcended it by ten fingers more, meaning that He is not finished with the universe—He is something more also. This means that a puny creature like a man or a woman has the same perfection God has; it is a question of difference of manifestation. And in innumerable ways we can manifest the Spirit in ourselves. When I first went

to America, thirty-five years ago, two women had been declared generals of the US Army, for the first time in history. There had been queens and fighters, but not generals. That means that an ordinary creature like a man or woman has unknown areas, undiscovered areas, unmanifested areas. So that is why Swamiji advised us to every day think of ourselves as the Atman and manifest the power of the Spirit.

Assert Yourself

One writer spoke of 'prayer without tears'. Prayer, normally, is asking. Now, Vedanta says, instead of weeping and crying, *assert*. You have got the power within you. Assert it. The theistic idea is that God has got the

power, and that we ask God, 'Please, God, give me something.' But instead of that, assert. Assertion is a better psychological technique. If we say, 'I have got a headache, I have got a headache; O Lord, do something for me', the subconscious absorbs the idea—headache, headache, headache. So instead of producing health, more unhealthiness will be produced. On the other hand, Vedanta will ask you to say, '*Śuddho'ham, buddho'ham, nirāmayo'ham*; I am pure, I am illumined, I am healthy.' You may argue, 'I am not healthy; I have a headache.' But, really speaking, you don't have a headache. Vedanta pushes you to the question, 'Who are you?' That is one of the enquiries Vedanta asks us to make. Some groups don't go into philosophy, religion, pujas and bhajans—they use straight questioning. Who

Vedanta says, instead of weeping and crying, assert. You have got the power within you. Assert it. The theistic idea is that God has got the power, and that we ask God, 'Please, God, give me something.' But instead of that, assert.

are you? Analyse, analyse, analyse. Vedanta asserts, 'I am not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit.' The moment you say, 'I am healthy, I am healthy', you are identifying with your Spirit nature. When you say, 'I have got a headache, I have got a headache', *who* has got the headache? The body, of course. Or, you may feel bad mentally, but you have already argued that you are not the body, not the mind, so *you* are not suffering. When you say 'I am healthy', you are telling the greater truth, the higher truth, the more enduring truth. Truth that is more enduring is real truth. Temporary truth is no truth.

The materialists came forward and said, 'No, we don't accept this. How do you know that this is so? Our studies don't reveal the Spirit.' The Vedantists explained, 'We don't

know your method of physical analysis or logical process, but we can realize the Truth by our special method of inspiration, or intuition, by what is called *anubhūti*, or experience, realization. These are different terms used by different schools to describe the ultimate understanding of one's real nature. This method may not be accepted by the materialists but that does not matter, for according to them it cannot be known by their methods. This is not evident to ordinary people, but the ultimate nature of everything is revealed to the realized soul.

Swamiji asserted that man is Divinity in human form. When he went to America, he told the people, 'You are not sinners. It is a sin to call you so.' Very dramatic sentences! And by the by, it would be a very good idea, especially for you young people, to memorize fifty,

If somebody denounces me and then gives me advice, half the time I am not going to accept it even if he is right. That is why Swamiji's method was to bring out the positive side.

sixty or seventy of these inspiring sayings of Swamiji. Through your whole life they will be useful. So when Swamiji said this, he was speaking to Americans, who were immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Europe, who had either been persecuted religiously or went to America because of famine or for a better livelihood. They found that the country was theirs for the taking. Soon there were ranches and fields, ten, twenty miles long. To such a person, if you say, 'You are a sinner; you are hopeless', he is not going to believe it. For religion's sake he may grudgingly agree, but he is not going to really accept it. Swamiji said, 'No, you are the all-powerful Spirit.' That appealed to the pioneering Americans. That is one reason why Swamiji became so successful. He inspired. He touched the real core of the people's lives. He told them, 'You are some-

thing grand, something infinite, something unending.' That is the special idea Swamiji tried to inject. In the Western context the idea of the divinity of man is the major idea that he thrust. In the Indian context it was the application of the ideal that we must see divinity in man—see it for ourselves. The *Bhagavadgita* identifies both, and Swamiji supported both ideas. But in the Western context, he made people aware of their spiritual nature. In the Indian context, he stressed the idea that the Atman should be seen in society.

Serving the Manifested Atman

Normally, commentators translate the word *ātmārāma* as 'one who finds bliss in the Self'. But is it bliss in the Self with closed eyes or opened eyes? Sri Ramakrishna is seen in both ways in the advanced stage. In his com-

mentary on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, Swami Tyagishanandaji explains that the effect of seeing the Atman everywhere is service of men and other creatures. So a man of illumination can do both: he may go within or serve the manifested Atman. Once

you have realized, you are free; what do you want to do? The swami is telling us that the normal, natural course of a man of illumination will be to serve others. It is a very beautiful way of putting Swamiji's ideas.

This is an important idea in the Indian context. Swamiji stressed this idea of service, because India needs service. Even after more than fifty years of independence, people are starving, people are ignorant. There has not been much improvement. Of course, they say forty per cent of Indians belong to the middle class, and that is why America has got interested in India. But, still, in the larger community, people are not free from hunger and insecurity, so some manifestation of energy is necessary. The Ramakrishna Mission immediately attracted the attention of society because of pinpointing this idea of serving society.

Nowadays, the question of relevance is often brought out. In what way, as a person or as a principle manifesting ideas, is Swamiji relevant? He is significantly relevant in two ways. Man must continually be made aware that he has got infinite possibilities. If he knows and believes that he has got possibilities, new avenues will open up. The method will be to serve others. That way, society will be benefited, the individual will be benefited. This way, Swamiji says, stage by stage a practitioner will go towards higher realization, which is the ultimate goal of life.

Everything Positive, Nothing Negative

Swamiji's special prescription is that all of us should have an ideal. His famous saying is, 'If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal.'¹ Swamiji always tried to improve people, not by showing their defects, but by showing their merits. By denouncing people, much result is not achieved, because it evokes resistance. If somebody denounces me and then gives me advice, half the time I am not going to accept it even if he is right. That is why Swamiji's method was to bring out the positive side. In one of his famous letters he says, 'No negative, all positive, affirmative. *I am, God is*, everything is in me. I will manifest health, purity, knowledge, whatever I want.' (6.276) But that has to be done by asserting the positive aspect of ourselves, by thinking of our divine nature. If I lack strength, I think of the Atman as full of strength. If I lack courage, I think of the Atman as full of courage. That is the method. There is another famous saying of his:

Disease was found out as soon as man was born. Everyone knows his disease; it requires

no one to tell us what our diseases are. But thinking all the time that we are diseased will not cure us—medicine is necessary. ... In our heart of hearts we all know our weaknesses. But, says the Vedanta, being reminded of weakness does not help much; give strength, and strength does not come by thinking of weakness all the time. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them. (2.300)

That is why, even for India his prescription is to think of strength, not weakness.

In one context Swamiji denounces India, but his major thrust is, 'Love India, honour India, respect India.' The idea is that you must develop that love for your own country. Not only for your country—ultimately you will have to embrace the whole world, but not by ignoring your country. Now the present world is being ruled by nationalism, and everywhere the nationalistic states are lionized. But, transcending nationalism, we must also recognize the universal idea—to make the entire world our own.

* * *

These are a few ideas from Swamiji. We can take up Swamiji from any angle and try to show that a particular idea of his is useful for the betterment of the individual, of society and of the world at large. That is the special purpose of a religious teacher, a teacher who is an inspirer. 'Awakener of souls' is the term often used for Swamiji. Let us be inspired by him; let us try to build our lives and also dedicate them for the good of everyone. *

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Either Way

On a church notice board: 'If you have troubles, come in and tell us about them. If you have none, come in and tell us how you do it.'

Reflections on Knowledge

SWAMI NITYASTHANANDA

From the standpoint of philosophy, there are two important human tendencies: analytical and synthetic. The analytical mind tries to 'know more and more about less and less'. It takes up a particular thing, studies its constituent elements, its qualities, actions and so on, analysing its every aspect to the minutest degree. This analytical approach has given rise to many philosophical schools like the Nyaya-Vaisheshika in India, to analytical schools like positivism in the West and to natural sciences. The synthetic mind is interested in a holistic approach to reality; it wants unity in diversity; it tries to resolve every particular to one unitary background; and its whole ambition is to know that 'by knowing which everything else is known'. The best fruit of this approach is Vedanta and other monistic schools of philosophy. Is there a converging point of these approaches of knowing?

Knowledge is Classification

We see a particular object, and if it is absolutely strange to us, we just say, 'It is some object.' Though we do not know what that object is, we know it is an object. That means we put it into the category of general idea of objects. Now when we move closer to it, we come to know that it is a tree and categorize it further as tree in general. Still closer observation reveals that it is a mango tree, and now it belongs to the category of general idea of mango tree. Further study reveals that it belongs to a particular variety of mango. What was earlier a general object now gets narrowed down to a particular object and this particularization can go on endlessly as the analysis penetrates into deeper layers of the object concerned. This reminds us of Swami Vivekananda's statement

that 'All our knowledge really consists of classification.'¹

Unity in Diversity

But where does this analysis ultimately lead? When we take up a particular object and go on analysing it, ultimately it melts into unity, shedding all its particularities. The analysis of, say, a chair takes us to its material cause wood, leaving behind its form, name and so on, which give it its individuality. And a further analysis of the wood reduces it to its constituent elements, which again are reduced to molecules and later to atoms and still later to energy particles such as electrons and protons, which are nothing but different modes of one universal energy field or superstring. Swamiji's concept of knowledge substantiates this: 'Knowledge is to find unity in the midst of diversity—to establish unity among things which appear to us to be different from one another.' (5.519)

Three Stages of Knowledge

According to Swamiji there are three main stages of knowledge. In the first stage everything appears *different from one another*, having no connection whatsoever, existing independently. But close observation reveals that nothing is disparate in this universe; all are *related to one another*; and there is mutual dependence everywhere. And this seeing everything as related is the second stage of knowledge. In the final stage everything is *seen as one*, without any differentiation. So knowledge is a mental journey from absolute diversity to absolute unity, where both analytical and synthetic approaches converge. It is a journey from matter to spirit, from the secular

to the spiritual. As Swamiji says:

Take anything before you, the most material thing—take one of the most material sciences as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology—study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics, in every department of knowledge. (3.2-3)

The Source of Knowledge: Outside or Inside?

Now we have been discussing the objective aspect of knowledge covering a wide spectrum—from the gross to the fine, matter to Spirit. But where does this knowledge come from? Is it hidden in the object known? Does the object—fine or gross—reveal itself? Or does knowledge come from within? Is it not absurd to think that knowledge comes from within, though the object is outside? We are now dealing with the causal aspect of knowledge. Swamiji contends, 'There is no knowledge in nature; all knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it within himself, which is pre-existing through eternity.' (1.422)

We normally think that we acquire knowledge from outside, from teachers, books and other mediums. But on a closer scrutiny of the process of knowledge, this common notion is proved to be naive. Knowledge is manufactured, as it were, within the mind with the help of data received from the senses. Outside, there are only objects and events, which stimulate the generation of knowledge within, which is neither in the object nor in the event. Our ordinary knowledge is a combination of outside stimuli and inside memory. No knowl-

This processing and organization of information is possible through thinking and reasoning, which are unfortunately not encouraged in this age of artificial intelligence. We stop at the level of information, which is enough to carry on technology-based everyday transactions, but not enough to build our personality.

edge is possible without the association of something which is already within. In the words of Swamiji:

Knowledge is, therefore, pigeon-holing one experience with the already existing fund of experience, and this is one of the great proofs of the fact that you cannot have any knowledge until you have already a fund in existence. If you are without experience, as some European philosophers think, and that your mind is a *tabula rasa* to begin with, you cannot get any knowledge, because the very fact of knowledge is the recognition of the new by means of associations already existing in the mind. (2.447)

Well-informed Intellect and Ill-formed Personality

We are now living in the age of information, and all sensory inputs of various kinds derived from varieties of media are bits of information crowding our brain. We are suffering from what is called by Jeremy Rifkin 'information overload'. Unless inputs are processed and organized properly by finding proper association of ideas within, they don't get converted into knowledge, and consequently, we remain ignorant despite all the wealth of information. It is worth quoting Jeremy Rifkin again: 'As more and more information is beamed at us, less and less of it can be absorbed, retained and exploited. The rest accumulates as dissipated energy or waste. The build-up of the dissipated energy is really just social pollution, and it takes its toll in the increase in mental disorder of all kinds, just as

physical waste eats away at our physical well-being.'²

This processing and organization of information is possible through thinking and reasoning, which are unfortunately not encouraged in this age of artificial intelligence. We stop at the level of information, which is enough to carry on technology-based everyday transactions, but not enough to build our personality, which requires assimilation of ideas through the process of thinking, like the assimilation of food through the process of digestion. We thus have a well-informed intellect but ill-formed personality. So Swamiji's

To see an external object means to see its representation as a mental modification within. All stimuli related to a particular object go to the mind, and with their help the mind takes the form of that object. We see that mental form or vritti and say that we are seeing the object outside.

concept that knowledge is within has profound significance in that it urges us to seek knowledge within, rather than outside, and it underlines the urgency of transforming information into knowledge and developing the habit of thinking.

Knowledge of Mental Modifications

All knowledge is made possible through modification of the mind, or *chitta-vritti*, and strictly speaking, our knowledge is nothing but the knowledge of *chitta-vritti*. So the Sankhya philosopher Panchashikhacharya encapsulated this idea in a pithy statement: 'Ekameva darśanam, khyātireva darśanam; The knowledge of *chitta-vritti* (khyāti) is the only knowledge we have.' To see an external object means to see its representation as a mental modification within. All stimuli related to a particular object go to the mind, and with their help the mind takes the form of that object. We see that

mental form or *vritti* and say that we are seeing the object outside. This is applicable to all forms of knowledge.

What Illumines the Vrittis?

Now the question is, what illuminates this *vritti*, just as an outside light illuminates outside objects? It is the light of the Self or Consciousness, says Vedanta. When this light is reflected through *chitta-vritti*, we get knowledge. In other words, what we call knowledge is nothing but the light of the Self. When we see an object outside, what we actually see is the light reflected through that object. Same is the case

with regard to knowledge of *chitta-vritti*. So it is the Self that is being revealed through all knowledge. This reminds us of the famous statement of the *Kena Upanishad*: 'Pratibodhavidi-tarī matam amṛtavatam hi vindate; Brahman is known when one sees the Self in every state of mind (knowledge), for one attains immortality by such knowledge.'³ Sri Shankaracharya expresses the same idea through a simile in his *Dakshinamurti Stotra*: 'Knowledge shines forth through the senses even as the light of a lamp kept in a pot with many holes.'⁴ So it is said that knowledge is the very nature of the Self.

Two Extreme Theories about Knowledge

There are a good number of theories regarding what is knowledge, ranging from the one that denies knowledge altogether to the one that considers that knowledge is everything. At the one end there is nihilistic Buddhism, which questions the validity of knowledge as a whole. Since everything is momentary, by the time we know a thing it is already non-existent. So, in fact, knowledge cannot reveal anything either objectively or subjectively. When *being* itself is questioned, there can be no question of knowledge. Since everything is

in a state of constant flux, one thing knowing another cannot be conceived.

At the other end, the Advaitins hold that knowledge itself is truth. To establish the momentary nature of knowledge, there must be awareness of a permanent reality. If everything is a constant flow of events, who is it that sees and understands this? Someone who is floating along with the current of the river cannot comprehend the nature of the current. Only when he comes out of the current and stands on the shore does he get a full picture of the flow. Likewise, there must be someone who observes the constant flow of events as a witness. He is the all-knowing Self, to whom belongs all knowledge and who is the source of all knowledge.⁵

'Knowledge is a Limitation'

According to some, what we call knowledge is nothing but ignorance; that is, knowing what is *not* there, for real knowledge of the object is impossible. Knowing something means superimposing our mental image over it. So knowing means 'ignoring' what is really there, which cannot be known. If we had some other sense organ or if we could grasp some radiation other than light with limited range, then the world would have appeared to us entirely different from what it is now, and consequently, our lifestyles also would have been completely different. So what we know is far from what *is*, which implies that all of our empirical life is going on in ignorance. Looking at it from another angle, knowing an object means limiting it to our understanding. We are bound to see things through our senses and the mind with all its preconceived notions, and consequently, our knowledge of things comes filtered through these instruments of knowledge. So Swamiji says, 'Knowledge is a limitation, knowledge is objectifying.'⁶

Scientific theories are also distorted at least to some extent by the mental colour of the scientists concerned. Albert Einstein says, 'Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. ... He (conditioned mind) will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison.'⁷

According to the Greek philosopher Plato, we cannot recognize any object unless we have the idea of that object already in the mind. To recognize that it is, say, a book, there must be a universal idea of the book already in the mind. When we see a strange object that we cannot identify, we just say, 'this is some-

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thing' and the recognition that it is 'something' is due to the universal idea of that 'something', which already exists in the mind. If somebody comes and explains what it is, further knowledge of that object is made possible because of the associated ideas already in the mind, without which we would never be able to understand what somebody says.

Parā- and Aparā- Vidyās

This means that we cannot see something outside if it does not already exist in the mind. If the universal idea of man is not there already in the mind, we cannot recognize man outside. If the universal idea of an object is not there in the mind, we cannot see any object outside. 'The whole world phenomena is noth-

ing but mental images.⁸ There is some reality that we do not know and over which the phenomenal world is superimposed; on the basis of that our normal empirical life is going on.

Perhaps we are left with two options: (1) Knowledge is nothing but superimposition and (2) Knowledge is the light of the Self. We may say that superimposed mental images are seen as objective knowledge, being illumined by light of the Self. This can be explained by an apt example given by Swami Nirvedanandaji in his *Hinduism at a Glance*. Mind with all its images can be compared to a film that is being projected through the projector called brain, and the whole phenomenal world is the projection of this film. As the electric light passing through the film appears as different scenes on the screen, so is the light of the Self passing through the mind appears as mental images. When the film called mind disappears what remains is only the Self with its pristine purity, unaffected by any adjectives. This is real knowledge (*parā-vidyā*) and the rest are its reflections (*aparā-vidyā*).

* * *

Let us conclude this discussion on knowledge with a note on ignorance! According to Vedanta, ignorance is not absence of knowledge, but wrong knowledge. When we take one thing for another, when we see something that is not there at that point (*atasmin tad-buddhiḥ*), that is called *avidyā*, or ignorance. We cannot imagine a mental state absolutely devoid of knowledge. When anyone says, 'I don't know', and if he is sincere about it, that is

also a form of knowledge (it is not ignorance). We cannot have a mental idea, or *chitta-vritti*, of a totally unknown object, about which concepts of neither knowledge nor ignorance can be had, for to say that I am ignorant of something, I must be having some idea of it already. So both knowledge and ignorance are *chitta-vrittis* illumined by the Self. It amounts to saying that ignorance also is a form of knowledge. So advancement of knowledge is not travelling from absence of knowledge to full knowledge, but from lesser or inadequate knowledge to a more adequate one. Perhaps Swamiji meant the same thing when he said that we are not travelling from error to truth, but from a lower truth to a higher one. *

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4. *Nānāchidra-ghatodara-sthita-mahādipa-prabhābhāsvaram jñānam yasya tu cakṣurādi-karaṇa-dvārā bahiḥ spandate; ...*
—*Dakshinamurti Stotra*, 4.
5. *Brahma-vidyāṁ sarva-vidyā-pratiṣṭhām*.
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6. CW, 2.82.
7. Quoted in Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 8.
8. *Manodṛśyamidāṁ dvaitāṁ yatkīñcit-sacarācaram*.
—*Mandukya Karika*, 3.31.

When a factory was burning down, the aged owner of the building was there weeping aloud at his loss.

'Dad, what are you weeping for?' said his son. 'Have you forgotten that we sold the factory four days ago?'

That instantly stopped the old man's tears.

—*Anthony de Mello*, *The Prayer of the Frog*, 1.205

Motherhood of God

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of mundane existence, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever.¹

The life of Sri Saradamani Devi, Holy Mother as she is reverentially referred to, is really an enigma. She could always be found engaged in all sorts of ordinary domestic work: scouring the floor, washing the vessels, cooking the food and serving guests. Even when she was a young woman of twenty-three, the simple, rustic, unassuming Sri Sarada Devi had the unique capacity to stand face to face with a dacoit at night in a lonely meadow. Her divinity must have created a deep impact on the dacoit's mind, for he was utterly disarmed and no harm came to her—the dacoit and his wife treated her as their daughter. It is reported that the dacoit saw Kali in her, and this is no wonder, for she was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna as Kali in Dakshineswar. Later on, Holy Mother herself told Shivaram, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, that she was Kali. Holy Mother's boldness, born of her spiritual quality, was displayed in all its frankness and purity, in its highest form, for the redemption of humanity. In her aspect as wife, while yet in the tender stage of a teenager, Sri Sarada Devi demonstrated the true idealism of a *sahadharmini* (co-partner in the path of dharma). Her supreme courage of conviction is evident in her words to Sri Ramakrishna when he mysteriously gave her the option of exercising her conjugal rights, although it meant he would be pulled into the mire of worldliness: 'Why should I drag you down to the path of samsara? I am here to help you in your chosen path.'

To superficial observers Holy Mother ap-

pears like any other village woman. Yet mighty spiritual giants like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda took special care to ceremonially purify themselves before visiting her and shook with pious emotion in her presence. All of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples felt like children before her. Her word was their command. Sri Sarada Devi did not command their respect merely because she was Sri Ramakrishna's wife. Her spiritual light was not at all 'borrowed': She was the very substance of the Divine Mother. Her life's intrinsic glory and greatness combined with her natural gifts and native perfection made people adore her as Holy Mother. Human life mirroring the Absolute—that was Sri Sarada Devi. In the record of religious biography we do not come across such a high manifestation of the divine Shakti as was found in her. Holy Mother's divine life reads like an ancient legend and appears to belong to the realm of mythology.

The human mind normally gravitates to the material plane. Ordinary people nurtured in secular, sensate cultures find it impossible to fathom the spiritual stature of Holy Mother. Barely can they appreciate, much less understand, such a divine character of immaculate purity. The veil covering Sri Sarada Devi's face was actually a curtain concealing the supernal splendour of her inner life. Swami Saradananda once remarked, 'We could get some inkling, at least, of the greatness of the Master, but of this lady we cannot understand anything. She has drawn the veil of maya so thick around her that none can see through it and have a glimpse of her greatness.' Swami Premananda also left us some beautiful and moving remarks on this aspect of her compassionate nature and self-effacement:

Who has understood the Holy Mother? Who

She was sweetness incarnate and grace abounding. Her simple words went right to the hearts of listeners, giving them complete solace and satisfaction. Her pure, immaculate nature radiated purity and serenity.

can understand her? You have heard about Sita, Savitri, Vishnupriya and Radharani. Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine powers was noticeable in her. ... What a supreme power that! ... Don't you see how many people are rushing on [to her]! The poison which we cannot digest, we just pass on to Mother and she gives refuge to everyone. Infinite is her power! Unbounded her mercy! Victory unto the Mother! ... What to speak of us—we have not found even Sri Ramakrishna doing this. ...

The exalted Empress has of her own accord appeared as the indigent woman. She sweeps floors, scours vessels, husks paddy and even removes the leavings of devotees after food. She has been undergoing great hardships at Jayarambati in order to teach the householders their duties. Infinite patience, unbounded mercy and above all the negation of even the slightest trace of egoism.²

In truth, Holy Mother was a rare personality of tremendous inner spiritual energy harnessed within an external appearance of utter tranquillity.

Holy Mother Is the Consummation of Sri Ramakrishna's Ideal

The great significance of Holy Mother's life is in the fact that the Sri Ramakrishna ideal of Motherhood of God reached its consummation in her. Her life was the continuation and wider unfoldment of the Master's message. She lived in a manner to exemplify His teachings; everything Holy Mother said and did was founded upon them. She was God-centered and God-circumferenced. Her love for God matched her love for man. In her life, we see both husband and wife making God their

joint venture. This is why the demise of the Master in 1886 temporarily cast such a deep gloom over her and left her with no zest for life. But His ecstatic trances, visions and assurances gave her peace. For the remainder of her life, in silent sacrifice and penance of the highest order, she fulfilled the mission of the Master, who left her behind to continue to exemplify His great renunciation and catholicity.

Holy Mother wholly merged her personality in that of the Master. Beginning as His disciple, assimilating all His ideas and making them her own vitality, she was found to excel even her illustrious husband in the qualities of forgiveness, affection, and renunciation and service. She became the consoler, guide and inspirer to many devotees and seekers. Having a clear idea of her spiritual ministry, the Master prepared her for her future work and commissioned her by saying, 'The people round about live like worms in darkness. You should look after them.' Towards the end of his life he asked her one day, 'Won't you do anything? Am I to do all?' To her reply, 'I am only a woman. What can I do?' the Master remarked, 'No, no. You have much to do.' And she did much indeed, for to her, Sri Ramakrishna was always a living entity. She always advised people to take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna in the midst of all their suffering, dangers and difficulties. Holy Mother was an eternal fountain of inspiration, the incarnation of mercy, whose flow of divine Motherliness soothed the scorched hearts of the people. Everyone who came near her went away refreshed and invigorated.

Holy Mother came to manifest the Motherhood of God. The essence of Motherhood is pure and serene love. In her character, one dominant trait overshadowed all the rest: her motherly love and concern. Most striking was her readiness to help everyone regardless of

caste, creed, colour and merit or the lack of it. She was sweetness incarnate and grace abounding. Her simple words went right to the hearts of listeners, giving them complete solace and satisfaction. Her pure, immaculate nature radiated purity and serenity. From her character, people learned the sterling virtues of self-abnegation, humility, modesty, chastity, ungrudging endurance of pain and suffering, selfless service, maternal love and devotion to God. Overwhelmingly greater than could be understood, the events of her life give us but a tiny glimpse of her worth. Words can only partially reveal the divine, spiritual glow of her hallowed life. The beautiful poem of her life was the sum of her noble teachings.

Holy Mother's Vital Role in the Dynamics of the Ramakrishna Mission

Ours is a frail and halting attempt to glimpse the magnificent character of Sri Sarada Devi, who was a perennial source of inspiration to the monks of the Ramakrishna Order and played a significant role in the fulfilment of the Ramakrishna Mission's work. Holy Mother wanted the Order to cherish the living personality of the Master in all its aspects. She gave the highest emphasis to the Order as an entity of love, sympathy and affection, not as an organization built of brick and mortar. It is on the bedrock of her motherliness that the Mission stands established. During the outbreak of the plague in Calcutta in 1899, the magnitude of the people's suffering so moved Swamiji that he considered selling the Belur Math property to defray the costs of the plague relief work. But when Holy Mother came to know about it, she cautioned Swamiji not to sell the Math property because the Mission would have greater and far-reaching consequences in the future by helping humanity in many diverse ways. Realizing his emotional reaction, Swamiji im-

mediately accepted Holy Mother's advice. Another time, when Swamiji wanted to follow the traditional custom and sacrifice a goat before the image of Durga, Holy Mother advised him not to do it, in view of the fact that monks should practise non-violence.

Holy Mother's Support of Swamiji and His Mission through the Order

Sri Ramakrishna earmarked the role of Swamiji as the great awakener of the people. Swamiji's new and bold orientation to monastic life was not relished by all at first. Visiting Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house at Belur in 1893, Holy Mother had a vision: she saw the Master's body dissolving in the Ganga and Swamiji sprinkling the holy water on innu-

She opined that those who joined the Order in the name of Sri Ramakrishna should be allowed to remain, notwithstanding the adverse remarks of the government. She suggested that Swami Saradananda could personally meet the Governor and explain the Mission's viewpoint.

merable devotees, all of whom were liberated. Therefore, Holy Mother understood the role of Swamiji in spreading the Master's message and gave all his schemes her unqualified support. It was with her blessings that Swamiji went to the West.

The monastic order of Sri Ramakrishna has been hailed as unique, containing within itself the energy and faith of both the East and the West. In its nascence, it battled with many internal and external forces. Swamiji had a dynamic philosophy of practical Vedanta, where the sublime philosophy of Vedanta is not allowed to languish in mere speculation by an elite class of brahmins or remain unknown to the masses. Swamiji's bold inspiration to press Vedanta into the service of the people initially

encountered resistance from his co-workers, who could not understand the relevance of social service in spiritual life. They did not readily understand Swamiji's redeeming motive in wanting to transfer the emphasis in religion from metaphysics to practical righteousness, from individual salvation to the salvation of all beings. This new orientation was already disapproved of by monks of other spiritual orders in India. In their opinion, such a novel path and one so obviously suggestive of Western ways could not be reconciled with traditional monasticism.

Conservative societies do not easily accept new ideas. Even after many years of accepting Swamiji's vision of practical Vedanta

unambiguous reply that the work started by Swamiji was in complete conformity with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. She said, 'It is far better to work than to let the mind be loose ... in riotous thinking. ... My own Naren observed all this and so laid down the foundation of selfless work.' Her defence of Swamiji was not based on any preferred love for him, but upon his attunement with the teachings of the Master. Paying a visit to the Sevashrama, Holy Mother said, 'I saw the Master himself present there, and that is why this work goes on here. These are all his work.'³ She further gave a ten-rupee note as her contribution to the Sevashrama fund as a token of her appreciation of such dedicated service to God in man.

The ten-rupee note itself is still preserved with the greatest care at the Sevashrama. Holy Mother's gift gave the workers a fresh impetus, for they were convinced that she knew Sri Ramakrishna better than anyone else did.

On 3 January 1901, after his second visit to the West, Swamiji went to the high Himalayan ashrama at Mayavati, whose guiding principle was abstinence from all ceremonial forms of worship. There, East-

ern and Western devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were allowed to devote themselves only to Advaitic practices. To his surprise, Swamiji saw a small shrine in the ashrama with a photo of Sri Ramakrishna, which was worshipped daily with flowers and incense. He severely reprimanded the head of the ashrama for violating the rules of the monastery. In deference to his views and without any specific advice or injunction from him to do so, they immediately stopped this form of worship. But one of Swamiji's disciples wrote to Holy Mother at Jayrambati about the incident and asked for her advice. She replied, 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why

ern and Western devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were allowed to devote themselves only to Advaitic practices. To his surprise, Swamiji saw a small shrine in the ashrama with a photo of Sri Ramakrishna, which was worshipped daily with flowers and incense. He severely reprimanded the head of the ashrama for violating the rules of the monastery. In deference to his views and without any specific advice or injunction from him to do so, they immediately stopped this form of worship. But one of Swamiji's disciples wrote to Holy Mother at Jayrambati about the incident and asked for her advice. She replied, 'Sri Ramakrishna was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why

should you not follow Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.' Holy Mother's words are proof of her 'unerring intuition', to use Sister Nivedita's oft-quoted assessment of her spiritual depth. This was in harmony with the goals of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Some political revolutionaries dedicated to winning India's freedom later joined the Ramakrishna Order with great sincerity and completely eschewed the path of politics. On 11 December 1916, Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, gave a statement casting aspersions on the Ramakrishna Mission. During that crucial period of India's history, the Mission's devotees and well-wishers became alarmed at the sinister consequences that might follow the Governor's unfriendly opinion of the Mission. They suggested to the Mission authorities that they ask the revolutionaries to leave the Order. At that juncture, Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, discussed the matter with Holy Mother, who firmly rejected this suggestion. She opined that those who joined the Order in the name of Sri Ramakrishna should be allowed to remain, notwithstanding the adverse remarks of the government. She suggested that Swami Saradananda could personally meet the Governor and explain the Mission's viewpoint.⁴ Accordingly, Swami Saradananda saw the Governor's private secretary with the result that the Governor finally exonerated the Mission and its members in his statement of 26 March 1917.⁵

Not only did Holy Mother bless all the Mission's philanthropic activities, but she was also keenly interested in all the details of its work. She always inquired in depth about these activities whenever relief workers came to her. Did the Mission find out and alleviate the people's woes? Holy Mother always wanted to know of this. She advised ordinary monks to earnestly accept philanthropic activity for their own benefit, recognizing that the

ordinary monk cannot remain absorbed in meditation round the clock. That is why,' she said, 'my Naren started all these centres for work. Our organization will function this way. Those who cannot adjust will leave.'

In Holy Mother are found the two elements that give the Ramakrishna movement its religion and its philosophy. The religious element centres round Sri Ramakrishna's life and personality and expresses itself through worship and ritual. The philosophical element is derived from his teachings and expresses itself by giving a rationale to spiritual life. Religion and philosophy are complementary to each other. Philosophy is barren without religion; religion leads to bigotry and harmful sentimentalism without philosophy.

Holy Mother respected ritual. She always carried a photo of Sri Ramakrishna, and in

She was an enigma. The world has never seen anyone like her. To think of her lovingly and reverently and to try to understand her a little will make our mind purer.

weal and woe, it was her nature to surrender everything to the Master. To her, his picture was the living God Satchidananda. His image was both guru and God to her—personal and impersonal. In Holy Mother were combined tradition and catholicism in the light of the Master's teachings. Although she was very punctilious about tradition, especially regarding food, she never offended anyone's sentiments. She moved very intimately with Miss Josephine MacLeod, Mrs Ole Bull, Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine and Sister Devamata, thus leading the way for members of Hindu society to absorb foreigners into their fold. Swamiji wrote charmingly about this to Shashi Maharaj: 'Mother is here, and the European and the American ladies went the other day to see her. And what do you think? Mother even ate with them! Isn't that grand!' And Sister Nivedita wrote, 'This gave us all a dig-

nity and made my future work possible in a way nothing else could have done.' Nivedita was given a separate room in Holy Mother's house. On 12 November 1898, Holy Mother graced the opening ceremony of Sister Nivedita's school with her presence. On that occasion she uttered the following blessing in a low voice: 'May the Divine Mother of the universe bless the school. May the girls trained here be ideals for the society.' To Nivedita, this benediction was a sublime gift. She could not have imagined a better omen. Holy Mother approved of the utility of women's education and encouraged many women to study at Sister Nivedita's school.

Holy Mother received her foreign devotees with motherly affection. It has been well said that Holy Mother, the high priestess of the power of Sri Ramakrishna, in a quiet yet dynamic way became the most potent instrument for imparting spiritual perfection among innumerable householders. Swamiji spread the message of the Master far and wide; Holy Mother silently sent it deep into the hearts of thousands. In other words, Swamiji spread the message horizontally; Holy Mother, vertically.

The Universally Redeeming Mother-Heart of God

Sri Ramakrishna left Sarada Devi in the world to manifest the Motherhood of God. God as Saviour is full of love. As a mother loves her children, the great Mother-Heart of God loves all. Holy Mother was an incarnation of Love. Her love is not exclusive. She herself

said, 'I am the Mother of all. I am the Mother of the good. I am the Mother of the bad, too.' In these words lies her greatest reassurance that every one of us is near to her, not far, for this assurance can only come from the Divine Mother Herself—Holy Mother was a special manifestation of the divine Shakti. Again, in her redeeming words is found the proof of Sri Shankara's words, '*Kuputro jāyeta kvacidapi kumātā na bhavati.*'⁶ Holy Mother never perceived wickedness or evil intention. She was the embodiment of renunciation and service. She was an enigma. The world has never seen anyone like her. To think of her lovingly and reverently and to try to understand her a little will make our mind purer. Let us all live with the great expectation that Holy Mother will ultimately accept us all, in spite of our lapses. May her 150th birth anniversary celebration be amply fulfilled in bringing enlightenment.

*

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What is necessary, my child, is earnestness. The Mother dwells in every heart and She does not take into consideration how much time you put into your practice, but only how sincerely you do it. She only takes into account how much love and devotion you have for Her. In whatever condition you find yourself, pray very sincerely, 'Mother, be gracious to me. Have mercy on me. Give me devotion and faith.'

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda

A Hymn to the Divine Person of Dakshineswar*

श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्ति-स्तोत्रम्

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

श्रीकालिकानगरवाहिनी
पतित-पावनी-श्रीगङ्गातीरे,
सुचारु-श्रीदक्षिणेश्वरे ।
शोभते तत्र श्रीकालीमाता, अरे,
शिव-गोविन्द-निलय-संयुक्ता,
श्रीकाली-मन्दिरे ॥१॥

In Kālikātā,¹ the city of Kali,
where the holy Ganga flows,
On her banks, the Dakshineswar
temple with its beauty glows.
Oh! the Divine Mother Kali
adorns the holy sanctum fair,
With the shrines of Shiva-Govinda
giving close by company there.

विस्तृत-शाखामण्डित-पञ्चवटी-
महीरुहतले, वेदिचत्वरे,
राजते अहो स्मितवदने दिव्यमूर्तिरिका
तत्र नवयुव-मण्डलान्तरे ।
प्रकाशयति मधुरलीलया युवानां
ईशतत्त्वं भावरसपरिपूर्ण
वन्दे तं श्रीरामकृष्णं, भवभयहरं,
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपं,
इदानीं श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥२॥

Under the spreading branches of the
holy Panchavati² there,
Youths have gathered on its altar;
oh! a scene so very rare.
A godly figure is seen conversing
with a benign smiling face,
Amidst a circle of zestful young men
wafting joy and peace and grace.
He sheds light on the nature of God,

and also on the divine play,
Enlightening the gathered youths
in a sweet and pleasing sporting way.
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
who frees devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

चित्रं वटरोम्ले युवाः शिष्याः समुत्सुकाः
गुरोस्तु वयोज्येष्ठ हि ब्रह्मभावप्रकाशकः
छेदयति संशयान् सर्वान्
लीलाभावैः कथामृतैः ।
वन्दे तं श्रीरामकृष्णं भवभयहरं,
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपं,
इदानीं श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥३॥

How amazing!
Under the holy banyan tree—
The disciples are young and eager,
The guru is elderly, yet with sportive
divine humour
He resolves their doubts and queries
in sweet and simple words,
And manifests the nature of Brahman
by passing into divine moods.
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
who frees devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

अद्वयतत्त्व-समाहित-चित्तं
प्रोज्ज्वल-भक्ति-पटावृत-वृत्तं

कामिनी-काञ्चन-मोह-विनष्टं
कर्म-कलेवरमद्भूत-चेष्टम् ।
वन्दे तं श्रीरामकृष्णं, भवभयहरं,
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपं,
इदानीं श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥४॥

His mind is absorbed in Advaita nature,
His person is wrapped in love-divine vesture.
To all delusions of lust and lucre
 he has put an end,
And is ever engaged in joyful service
 of all mankind.
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
 who frees devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
 who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
 the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

ॐ नमः प्रणवार्थाय ज्ञानानन्द-सुवर्षिणे
निर्मलाय प्रशान्ताय श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-
शिव-स्वरूपिणे ।
सुशान्त-सर्वन्दित्य-वृत्तिमन्ताय जगद्वितैषिणे
नमः श्रीरामकृष्णाय इदानीं
श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तये ॥५॥

The living symbol of the holy Pranava,
 The Om embodied, whom all adore,
Pure and tranquil, he does always
 Knowledge, Peace and Bliss shower.
Having put to quiet-rest the turbulent
 waves of senses and mind,
Who is ever engaged in joyful service
 of all mankind
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
 the divine Mūrti of this age,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
 the great Shiva of Puranic lore,
 who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar.

निधये सर्वविद्यानां भिषजे भवरोगिणां
गुरवे सर्वलोकानां ज्ञानामृत-प्रदायिने ।
वन्दे तं श्रीरामकृष्णं भवभयहरं,
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपं,
इदानीं श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥६॥

The treasure house of sciences
 and of all learning,
The physician of all worldly
 ills and suffering,
The guru who bestows the nectar of
 Knowledge Spiritual,
To all people without any
 cumbersome ritual,
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
 who frees devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
 who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
 the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

अन्तरङ्गैः स्वसच्छिष्यैरावृतं भक्ति-निष्ठादि-युक्तैः
अमृतोपमैर्वक्यैः यः प्रकटयति
ब्रह्मतत्त्वं युवानाम् ।
आचार्यन्दं करकलित-चिन्मुद्रमानन्दपूर्ण
स्वात्मारामं मुदितवदनं
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपं,
वन्दे तं श्रीरामकृष्णं, भवभयहरं,
इदानीं श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥७॥

Encircled by his virtuous disciples,
 imbued with faith and devotion,
He inculcates in nectarean words
 that Brahman permeates all creation.
The teacher of teachers with a smiling
 countenance benign,
And restful in the Atman always
 in a blissful vein,
He communicates the essence of
 the holy Vedic scripture,
His hands and fingers posed in
 an enlightening gesture.
Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna,
 who frees devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
 who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar,
The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
 the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

वितरितुमवतीर्ण ज्ञान-भक्ति-प्रशान्तीः
प्रणयगलितचित्तं जीवदुःखासहिष्णुं

मनसि-वचसि-काये-पुण्यपीयूषपूर्ण
त्रिभुवनमुपकारः श्रेणिभिः प्राणयन्तम् ।
स्मर स्मर स्मर रे मानस
श्रीदक्षिणामूर्ति-शिवस्वरूपम्,
तं श्रीरामकृष्णं, भवभ्यहरं,
श्रीदक्षिणेश्वर-दिव्यमूर्तिम् ॥८॥

Incarnated to spread widely

Knowledge, Peace and Devotion,
His loving heart melted by the sorrows
of creation,

His body, mind and speech are
with holy nectar filled,
And by his series of benevolent deeds

the triple world is pleased.

Remember, remember, O mind, remember,
That Sri Ramakrishna, who frees
devotees from all worldly care,
The divine Mūrti of this age,
who graced the holy Sri Dakshineswar

The Incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurti—
the great Shiva of Puranic lore.

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Notes

* This composition was inspired mainly by Acharya Sri Shankara's *Dakshinamurti Stotra*. Four verses from it are made use of appropriately with changes. A verse from Swami Vivekananda on Sri Ramakrishna, and one or two lines from three verses from different sources have also been made use of modifying them suitably.

1. Calcutta (Kālighaṭṭa, Kālikātā, Kal-kātā, Calcutta, now Kolkātā).
2. Panchavati is a cluster of five varieties of holy trees grown together, of which the banyan forms the biggest one with spreading branches. It, the Panchavati, is considered holy and a platform is built around the trees for sadhana and other spiritual purposes.

The Master's Greatness

If a spiritual aspirant attains illumination in any place, that place becomes holy, and this is the holiest of holy places. How sacred is the very dust of this place! It will take a long time for humanity to know and realize what Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were. The world has not seen such spiritual giants manifested for the good of the world in thousands of years. Buddha came, and after several hundreds of years people understood a little of him, and his liberal message spread throughout the world. Just think, what a furore was made over a tooth of Buddha that had been carried somewhere! What a big temple was built to commemorate that tooth! And here we have the relics of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji and the others. When I think about these things, my hair stands on end. How many people will come from distant countries to worship the ground of Belur Math! There is already an indication of that. It is not yet fifty years since the Master's passing away and yet what a spiritual revolution is taking place throughout the world because of his personality. We are blessed that we can see these things. You will see even greater things.

The Master came this time as the living embodiment of all religious paths. That is why he practised many religious disciplines and obtained illumination through them. The Master's life is the living embodiment of every religious ideal. Now you will see that the votaries of every religion will derive new life, hope and inspiration from his divine life, moulding their own religious life in accordance with his life.

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda, Belur Math, 1932

The Power of Faith

PRAVRAJIKA SEVAPRANA

We have all heard the old clichū 'faith that moves mountains', yet we know that just believing in something does not necessarily make it true. Real faith is based on truth, and it has tremendous power. Sri Ramakrishna says that during his sadhana he went through a period when everything he even thought about would just come true. One time he thought, 'If this vision is true, the rock in front of me will jump three times.' He says the rock did jump three times. (This is really hard for our Western minds to accept.) Even Mathur Babu once had an argument with Sri Ramakrishna, when Mathur said, 'Oh, come on. You can't go against the laws of nature. You can't have, for example, a red and a white flower growing on the same branch.' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Anything is possible for the Divine Mother. She makes the rules and she can also break them.' Sure enough, in a little while he presented Mathur with a branch on which was growing a red and a white blossom. Jesus walked on the water and others saw it. It is said that Mohammed did not need to go to the mountain. The mountain came to him. What makes the faith of a Ramakrishna or a Mohammed different from the faith of other men? The words and actions of God-men are surcharged with power, because they are directly in touch with Truth.

'Thy Faith Hath Made Thee Whole'

In the case of a student and a teacher, much also depends on the shraddhā, or faith, and earnestness of the disciple. Shraddhā evokes a great power; it calls it forth as it were. In the Bible a story is told of a woman healed by faith. The incident took place when Jesus was travelling with his disciples near the sea-

side. He was teaching and healing people, and a great multitude of them were following him. Jesus had been asked to go to the house of an official of the synagogue. His daughter was dying and he wanted Jesus to heal this girl.

We can picture it in our minds: Jesus was walking, on his way to the official's house, his disciples and a crowd surrounding him. There was a woman in the crowd who had been suffering for twelve long years with a bleeding illness. She had gone to all the physicians and had spent all her money on medicines and diet, but nothing helped her. She was desperate. And somehow in her was born the idea, if she could just see Jesus, just touch the hem of his garment, she would be healed. She pushed forward in the crowd, reached out and touched his robe. Immediately she felt herself healed. Imagine her joy. It is said she knew immediately she had been healed. And Jesus also knew. He turned and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' The woman was afraid. Imagine the scene: here was this God-man, surrounded by his disciples, and suddenly he stops and says, 'Who touched me?' The woman came forward, trembling, fell sobbing at his feet and told him what had happened to her. And Jesus blessed her and said to her, 'Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole.'¹

What made Jesus turn back? Did he feel somehow the power that was in him go out to this woman? Who can say? But what a sweet picture: his turning, her confusion and fear, and yet also what must have been her wonder and joy. And what did he say? 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.' Something in her, her faith, drew the healing power to herself. But where did that power come from? From within her, yes, but also from the Master. It is as though

that which was blocking the vital force in her was knocked down as it were, removed by the power of purity and love that was coming from Jesus. Then the woman's own prana healed her. Swami Vivekananda says that in the case of faith healing the dormant prana in the sick person is awakened by the healer and heals the person.

The Meaning of Real Faith

On an even more subtle level, faith is essential for spiritual progress, for only then, when one believes that God exists, does one strive to be free. One must have tremendous faith in religion and God. Sri Ramakrishna once told Swamiji that not one in twenty million in this world believed in God. Swamiji asked him why he said this, and Sri Ramakrishna told him, 'Suppose there is a thief in this room, and he gets to know that there is a mass of gold in the next room, and only a very thin partition between the two rooms; what will be the condition of that thief?' Swamiji answered, 'He will not be able to sleep at all; his brain will be actively thinking of some means to get at the gold, and he will think of nothing else.' Then Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Do you believe that a man could believe in God and not go mad to get Him? If a man sincerely believes that there is that immense, infinite mine of Bliss, and that it can be reached, would not that man go mad in his struggle to reach it?' 'Strong faith in God and the consequent eagerness to reach Him constitute Shraddha [real faith].'²

Shraddhā to Exertion to Achievement

The English dictionary says that faith is the 'confidence or trust in a person or thing—belief which is not based on proof'. Often it is referred to as 'blind faith' because it is not based on rational thought. People are directed to have faith and not to question. This is not what is meant by the Sanskrit word *shraddhā*, although this word sometimes is translated in English by the word *faith*.

Shankara defines shraddha as 'a firm conviction based upon intellectual understanding, that the teachings of the scriptures and of one's master are true. It leads to realization of the Reality'.³ This type of faith is not just a blind or unquestioning acceptance or belief. According to Swami Nikhilanandaji, it is rather 'an affirmative attitude of mind'. The mind is open and the will is directed towards a higher reality. So the mind that has faith is both receptive and also directed, but in a very focused way. This means that the aspirant who has faith is willing to make effort and sacrifice because he believes it is necessary. Belief is translated into action. Shankara says, 'Without faith there is no exertion, and without exertion there is no achievement'.⁴

Sri Ramakrishna says that one should have faith in the holy name given by the guru and with it practise spiritual discipline. He said that the pearl oyster makes itself ready for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. Taking a drop of that rain, it dives into the fathomless depths of the ocean and remains there until the pearl is formed.⁵ In fact, he says that if a person's faith is deep enough, he will have the vision of God the minute the mantra is given by the teacher. It is almost as though shraddhā attracts grace to a person, or perhaps it is just that shraddhā clears the way for grace to act in the person.

Fundamentals of Faith

Shraddhā is based on certain fundamental truths or principles. First we must be convinced in the existence of God. It is said that one does not have real faith until one has some spiritual experience. This is true, but before that, if we are seekers after truth, we can have a working faith in the existence of God and in the words of the guru. It is not just blind credibility. We will gradually know that God is real.

We also need to believe that God can be realized. We get this conviction from reading the scriptures, where others have told their experiences and, mainly, from meeting spiritual

teachers, those who, we know, have experienced God. I was reading a letter of Swamiji written to Balaram Bose in 1890. At that time Swamiji had gone to visit the holy man Pava-hari Baba. He said that seeing saints like him gave one real faith in the scriptures. The quote is, 'Unless one is face to face with the life of such men, faith in the scriptures does not grow in all its real integrity.'⁶ If one is fortunate enough to have met an illumined teacher, then by the grace of God one really sees that realization of God is possible for a human being. It is no longer just talk: it is a living reality. This is the turning point in the lives of many, because this is when real faith awakens in the heart. When we see a person who has realized something higher, suddenly we find that our own spirituality begins to awaken. We see that what we have been reading about in the scriptures is really true. And we understand that if the person we have met has realized God, then it must be possible for another also to do so.

When we have the first two convictions, that God is real and that He can be realized, then we really begin to yearn for God. We become convinced that God-realization is the supreme goal of human existence. It becomes *our* goal, and more and more other things lose their attraction for us.

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'You must have heard about the tremendous power of faith. It is said in the Purana that Rama, who was God Himself—the embodiment of Absolute Brahman—had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon. But Hanuman, trusting in Rama's name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge.'⁷ A person with faith has a determination and intensity that nothing else can give.

Swami Vivekananda says, 'If this [God] is true, what else could matter? *If it is not true, what do our lives matter!*'⁸ This is the intensity we need. Suddenly the goal of life, God-realization, becomes real to us. We must have faith that He really exists.

Realization Inspires Faith

Generally speaking, because of our materialistic background, we have faith only in what we see with our eyes or what can be proved in a scientific way, perceivable by our senses. It is very difficult for us to accept anything as really true because we see falsehood all round us. Where is absolute truth in this relative world? Where is even a relative truth when everything is always changing and everything is mixed, good and evil, transitory and illusory? Where can we ever see a person truthful in speech and action? It is very difficult to have faith and real trust in anything or anybody in this changing world. That is why it was such a wonderful thing when Swamiji asked Sri Ramakrishna if he had seen God and Sri Ramakrishna answered with such conviction, 'Yes, I have seen God more clearly than I see you.' Hearing that statement directly from such a teacher would certainly stop the doubting, fluctuating mind in its tracks!

The Quintessence of Vedanta tells us, 'To the extent to which one speaks the truth, one inspires faith.' The Vedas are to be trusted because they constitute the word of God.⁹ Not just because they are Vedas, but because they are revealed truths, that is, realized by men and women. The words of an illumined teacher are trusted because they are also true, experienced by him. Something in us tells us they are true and he is speaking from experience. If he has realized it, then it is also possible for us to realize it. By his very existence, he is telling us that we can also realize these truths.

Needed: A Glimpse beyond the Senses

The real awakening of faith in the heart of a person takes place when he gets a glimpse of something beyond the sense world. One can intellectually accept that there may be some higher reality, since so many scriptures and spiritual teachers have said so, but real faith will not come until the heart opens a little and one gets a glimpse of that higher reality within

one's own self. Then one really knows that there is a higher reality. And once this glimpse comes, it is never forgotten. It may get covered up, but it is never really forgotten. Swami Brahmananda says, 'Real faith cannot be had at the beginning. First realization, then real faith—at the beginning, blind faith it may be—in the words of his guru or some great soul; but only then can he advance toward the goal.'

So we start out with a working faith in the words of scripture or in the guru and we make that our own. We are not just to accept blindly, we must realize it. Swamiji says, 'If any one of you believes what I teach, I will be sorry. I will only be too glad if I can excite in you the power of thinking for yourselves. ... You have to realise truth and work it out for yourself according to your own nature.'¹⁰

Hearing and Reasoning

It is said that one should first hear about the truth, then reason about it. We must make this truth our own. It is ours; it is with us all the time, but it is covered up. By thinking about it, by questioning a teacher, our reason can become satisfied that what is said in the scriptures must be true. We can accept a lot by inference, by accepting what others tell us. We cannot, however, really grasp the higher truth with our intellect, but we do need to question before we are really able to settle down to serious spiritual practice. For some people this intellectual questioning and searching seems to take longer and seems to be more intense than for others. Swamiji says, 'I fought my Master for six years with the result that I know every inch of the way!' (9.411)

In the end the mind itself must become our friend. It can help us tremendously if we watch it, understand it, discipline it, maybe even cajole or humour it. Somehow we must convince it that this is really what we want to do. Ultimately, the mind must be turned towards the goal. It must be made our friend. This task can be daunting. As Arjuna says in the *Gita*, trying to control the mind is like try-

ing to control the wind.¹¹

Waywardness of the Mind

If we watch our mind we often find that it is carrying on a constant conversation within us. In his book *How to Know God*, a commentary on the yoga aphorisms of Patanjali, Swami Prabhavananda gives us a picture of how a normal mind works. He says we flatter ourselves that 'we spend our time thinking logical, consecutive thoughts', but our mind is more like a 'fog of disconnected sense-impressions, irrelevant memories, nonsensical scrapes of sentences from books and newspapers, little darting fears and resentments, physical sensations of discomfort, excitement or ease'. The swami says further that the thought-pattern in eighteen or nineteen minds out of twenty is irrational, maybe something like this: 'Inky-bottle. That time I saw Roosevelt. In love with the night mysterious. Reds veto Pact. Jimmy's trying to get my job. Mary says I'm fat. Big toe hurts. Soup good.'¹² When I first read that I just laughed out loud, because I could certainly recognize that it was like what my mind was feeding me, and I simply had never stood back and really looked at it before, never really listened to what was going on inside my mind.

Filling the Mind with Holy Ideas

Comments about other people or circumstances, worries, anxieties—they all seem to come to the surface in words. We know that in the end words must stop. We don't have to go on listening to all this. It is said that when one realizes Brahman the mind turns back along with speech.¹³ So this talking mind has ultimately to turn back. But for a long time we have to work with this mind to make it our friend instead of our enemy. Just watching it and noticing what it says can help a lot. It is almost as if it gets shy and embarrassed if we watch it, and sometimes it quiets down. Again, if we watch the mind we find that it is feeding us negative thoughts, blaming others or doubts about what is to be done or about our capaci-

ties. We don't have to go on listening to these negative or random thoughts. We can feed the mind good thoughts. Of course, one of the best practices here is to substitute the constant mind-talk with the mantra. Give the mind something to talk about. Underneath this talking mind there is a substratum where there are no doubts and no words, a substratum that is Knowledge itself. If we can somehow open up to this inner truth, the battle is won. Real faith can do this in one stroke. It directly opens the pathway to truth. This is going to sound very simplistic, but we can pray that we have faith. Sounds too simple, doesn't it? But this is exactly what Sri Ramakrishna says we should do: pray for devotion and faith. Truly, a simple faith can unite the mind and make it concentrated, and a sincere prayer can do wonders.

Faith in the Guru

According to Vedanta, faith in the scriptures is not enough. We believe in the scriptures because they are revealed truths; they come from saints and sages who realized the truths written there. But we need to receive these truths directly from a living guru. They are quickened by the teacher. They become living truths in the heart of the student. It is said that when the disciple is ready the guru comes. We cannot really understand the truths of the scriptures until we are taught by a living teacher who has experienced the truth himself. He ignites the spark already present in us and urges us forward on the spiritual path. We must have faith in his words. Everything is realized according to one's faith. Shankara says, 'One should therefore cultivate supreme faith in the guru, and in what the Vedanta says. It is by faith alone and by no other means that the earnest seeker attains liberation.'¹⁴

How does that faith in the words of a teacher come to us? For some it is a slow process of questioning and watching and testing what they are taught. What the teacher says must agree with the scriptures and should not

contradict reason. But here again, real faith comes only when one gets a glimpse of something higher. Often, it is the power of love that draws us in and gives us faith. We find that no one has ever loved us before with the kind of love that comes from a really pure illumined soul, because in that love there is no selfishness. When we come in contact with that type of love, something in our own hearts awakens and responds. Love awakens in us, and it is so sweet that we want nothing else. Everything else fades out, becomes shadow-like, and our faith grows.

Openness to the Divine Impulse

Who is the teacher anyway? The teacher is a conduit for Truth to reach the soul. The more faith one has, the more one is able to receive, because the more open one is. It seems that real faith or belief implies openness to that divine impulse. There is no doubt blocking it and the will is directed towards receiving truth. Real faith is like yearning for God, for in both cases the fact that God is and can be reached is intrinsic. A man doesn't have to work hard if he has real faith, faith in his guru's words. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the parable of the milkmaid and the brahmin priest: A milkmaid used to supply milk to a brahmin priest on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service, the woman was sometimes late. One day the priest rebuked her for the delay, and she explained that sometimes she had to wait a long time for the boatman to ferry her across. The priest said, 'But my good woman! People cross even the ocean of this life by uttering the name of God. Can't you cross even this little river?' From that day onwards she was never late with the milk. One day the priest asked her how it was that she was never late any more, and she said simply, 'I take the name of God and cross the river just as you told me!' The priest was astonished and wanted to see for himself, so he went to the river with the woman and watched her as she uttered the

name of God and started to walk across the water. Halfway across, the woman turned and saw the priest following her, timidly holding his skirt up out of the water. She said, 'Why is it, sir, that you are repeating the name of the Lord and at the same time holding up your skirt to keep it dry? Have you no faith? We do this. We are constantly trying to hedge our bets. It is really very hard to fully believe anything.'

If a man has real faith, the moment the teacher tells him 'Here is God' or 'Thou art That', he will realize the Truth. A less evolved aspirant will really begin to search for realization, because he will believe it is possible. Even in a more worldly sense, one with faith will progress more rapidly.

Faith and Concentration

There is a story in the *Mahabharata* about Arjuna's student days in archery that illustrates this point. When Arjuna was young he was educated in archery with his brothers and cousins. They had the great Drona as their teacher. When Drona was reaching the end of his instruction to the young princes, he devised a test to see which one had learned archery well. He constructed a stuffed bird and had it placed high at the top of a tree almost out of sight. Then he called the young princes and told them to try to shoot the target.

First he called Yudhishtira, the eldest, and told him to aim at the target. Yudhishtira put an arrow on his bow. Drona said, 'Aim at the bird,' and asked, 'Do you see the bird?' Yudhishtira said, 'Yes. I see the bird.' Then Drona asked, 'What else do you see?' Yudhishtira said, 'I see the bird, the tree, the sky, and I see you.' Dronacharya was not pleased. He said, 'Put down the bow. You will not be able to hit the target.' Then Drona called Duryodhana and his brothers and also Bhima forward, one by one, and asked them to aim at the bird. When each one aimed his arrow, Drona asked, 'What do you see?' Each one replied, 'I see the bird, the tree, the sky, and I see

you.' Each one was sent away. Finally, Drona called Arjuna forward and asked him to aim at the bird. Arjuna aimed his arrow. Then Drona asked, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said, 'I see only the bird.' Then Drona said, 'Aim at the eye of the bird.' Arjuna aimed his arrow. Then Drona asked, 'What do you see?' Arjuna replied, 'I only see the eye of the bird.' Drona then said, 'Shoot.' Arjuna shot his arrow and it pierced the eye of the bird, and the bird fell at his feet.

Real faith or *shradhdha* is said to be something like this. The teacher points the way. What the teacher says to concentrate on, that and that alone the student sees. This excludes a whole lot of extraneous thoughts and scattered energies, and results in real concentration of the mind.

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* realization is described in terms of archery: 'Om, the mystic syllable, is said to be the bow; the self within, the arrow; and Brahman, the target. One should hit that target with an undistracted mind, and like the arrow become one with it.'¹⁵

Swamiji says, 'These [great souls] are signposts on the way. That is all they are. They say, "Onward, brothers!"'¹⁶ They point the way.

The Grace of Our Own Mind

And we read in the *Gospel*: 'As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;/ As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;/ And faith is the root of all.'¹⁷ Everything can be attained through simple faith! But our faith must be practical. Belief must be put into action and it must be based on reason. The intensity of our striving is actually based on our faith in the existence of God. We may be able to quote all the scriptures, but that won't help us at all if we don't really believe that it is possible for us to realize the Truth. One must have the grace of one's own mind. That is, the mind should not be divided against itself. One must be directed and open to the Truth, and have patience and

endurance to carry on one's spiritual practice. We must know that it is possible for us to realize God.

Faith in Ourselves

We must have faith in ourselves before we can have faith in God. Swamiji says:

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. ... Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. ... Faith in ourselves will do everything. ... The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourselves means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better.¹⁸

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God —this is the secret of greatness.' (3.190)

According to Swamiji, religion is a matter of fact; we are not to believe in it just blindly. 'We have to analyse our own souls and ... find what is there. We have to understand it and ... realize what is understood. That is religion. No amount of talk will make religion.' (2.163)

At first we must cultivate faith. It is listed as one of the great virtues and must be nurtured with all the other qualities that perfect our character. It is only when our character becomes really pure and stable, when our nature is perfected, that true shraddhā dawns. Until then all our belief in God, in the guru and in the scriptures vacillates. Our aim in life should be to have firm unshakeable faith.

Faith and Doubt Cannot Coexist

Says Sri Ramakrishna, 'If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins ... he will certainly be saved through this faith. Let him only say to God, "O Lord, I will not repeat such an action", and he need not be afraid of anything.'¹⁹ There is no

point in brooding over past mistakes. They're over. We can let go of them. In the song '*Shakti samudra*' Swamiji calls Sri Ramakrishna a mighty weapon that destroys the demon of doubt. Sri Ramakrishna is very close to us. We can use this weapon to cut down the doubts at their root. He can quieten the confused hubbub of the mind. In the *Gospel* someone asks, 'Sir, is there no help, then, for a worldly person?' 'Certainly there is,' says Sri Ramakrishna. 'From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, "Give me faith and devotion." Once a person has faith he had achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.' (87) We are back to that very simplistic idea: one can pray to have faith.

Once a man was about to cross the sea. Vibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man's wearing-cloth, and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here—the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.' The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rama!' As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water. (87)

Swami Saradananda says, '... he who has taken refuge in the Lord, has he anything to complain of or worry about? He knows that he has surrendered himself to Him and the Lord has accepted him. This is all that he need be aware of. ... Like the kitten, he knows only his mother. Wherever his mother places him he is contented.'²⁰

Faith of a Child in Its Mother

Sri Ramakrishna tells us, 'God cannot be realized without childlike faith. The mother says to her child, pointing to a boy, "He is your elder brother." And the child at once believes that the boy is one hundred per cent his brother. ... God bestows His grace on the dev-

otee who has this faith of a child.²¹

If we try to remember our very earliest memories, we can see that we had total trust and faith in our mothers. There was simply no question of anything else. We were held, fed and cared for by our mothers. We were so dependent on them that we never even thought who was going to feed us or care for us. In fact, in the earliest times I don't think a small baby even distinguishes completely between itself and its mother. I know that for a long time I never really distinguished the face of my mother. She was more a presence, a warmth and a love. If we try to remember this relationship even on the human level, we can understand better what is meant by real faith, because our human relationships are really mere reflections of the divine. There is absolutely no doubt in the relationship between the mother and her child. It is complete, open trust, so much so that it approaches unity. Maybe it is because of this inherent understanding that Swami Brahmananda says, 'Women generally have greater results spiritually in less time because their faith is greater.'

Faith Born of Realization

We must have faith in our higher selves. Sri Ramakrishna has a story to illustrate this:

Once Vyasa was about to cross the Jamuna, when the gopis also arrived there, wishing to go to the other side. But no ferry-boat was in sight. They said to Vyasa, 'Revered sir, what shall we do now?' 'Don't worry,' said Vyasa. 'I will take you across. But I am very hungry. Have you anything for me to eat?' The gopis had plenty of milk, cream, and butter with them. Vyasa ate it all. Then the gopis asked, 'Well, sir, what about crossing the river?' Vyasa stood on the bank of the Jamuna and said, 'O Jamuna, if I have not eaten anything today, then may your waters part so that we may all walk to the other side.' No sooner did the sage utter these words than the waters of the Jamuna parted. The gopis were speechless with wonder. 'He ate so much just now,' they said to themselves, 'and he says, "If I have not eaten anything ..."!' Vyasa had the firm conviction [faith], that it was not him-

self, but the Narayana who dwelt in his heart, that had partaken of the food.²²

In the *Bhagavadgita* it is said that shradhā, devotion and self-control are the necessary requirements for knowledge.²³ In his commentary on this verse Madhusudana Sarasvati defines faith as 'a taste for the supreme Truth'.

Again, describing the characteristics of a true devotee, Sri Krishna says, 'Those who fix their minds on Me and devotedly worship Me steadfastly with supreme shradhā—they are the best of all contemplative persons, the best of all devotees.' (12.2) Latu Maharaj once said, 'He alone is fit to take sannyasa who can throw himself, at the behest of his guru, headlong from the top of a palm tree, with his hands and feet outstretched. Such a man alone has developed a true dependence on the guru and on God.' Do we have that type of trust, that faith?

Faith and Self-surrender

It seems that real faith is like self-surrender because with full trust one submits to the power of God, which immediately fills one up. It is not a small thing to really surrender. It is as though one is driving a car up a steep mountainside, trying to get to the top, where there is an immense treasure of bliss. We have an idea of the goal and of the way to get there. One is concentrating on every turn, driving the car, struggling upward, when suddenly, near the top, the road becomes straight and smooth for a short distance. The car gains speed and suddenly becomes airborne and heads for the sun. For a second, one thinks 'My God! What's happening? Where am I headed? I'm out of control.' This was *not* what *we* planned, not part of *our* agenda. Without real faith one grabs the wheel and tries hard to get the car back on the familiar road. We cling to our body consciousness, to our *ideas* of what the goal is and what the path is, what our meditation should be. With real faith one might say, 'Yes, the sun! Yes! Yes! My God the Sun! I'm *not* in control. This is what I've been waiting for!' One lets go and is lifted into that Light of

Consciousness. Otherwise, without real faith, we may turn away from the Light in fear when it comes to us. We may try to hold on to our little individuality, our ideas of who we are, afraid that somehow we are going to be annihilated.

That is the leap of faith. One gives up one's sense of little self and of agency. One dies as it were. And what does one experience? After that experience there is no more doubt. Real faith is born. We cannot realize Truth without that leap, without letting go at some point, because we really don't know what the goal is until we experience it, become one with it. It is not whatever we *think* it is, no matter how noble our idea is. We are going to be surprised when we realize it. And we can't attain it by our own efforts. At some point we have to resign ourselves and let the higher reality shine through. It takes faith to let go, to make that leap. Once God is experienced, the knowledge or belief that God exists never dies.

This is the faith that moves mountains, real faith based on truth and realization. The *Gita* says, 'Established in realization [and faith born of it], a man is not shaken even by the heaviest sorrow.' (6.22) We see this type of faith in those who have realized God. All doubts disappear when one realizes the Self. Those who realize God rest in faith as it were. And the certainty of such men and women inspires faith in others. They are so sure that the knots of their heart are cut asunder and they are carried, as it were, by faith. This is the power of faith. Swami Brahmananda is said to have remarked in his last days, 'I am floating on the leaf of faith and knowledge on the Ocean of Brahman.'²⁴ What a blissful state! *

References

1. *St Mark*, 5.34.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.407.
3. *Vivekachudamani*, 25.
4. *The Quintessence of Vedanta*, trans. Swami Tattwananda (Kalady: Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, 1979), verse 212.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 244.
6. CW, 6.221.
7. *Gospel*, 87.
8. CW, 8.261.
9. *Quintessence*, verse 216.
10. CW, 6.64-5.
11. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.34.
12. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975), 46.
13. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.4.1.
14. *Quintessence*, verse 215.
15. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.4.
16. CW, 1.483.
17. *Gospel*, 108.
18. CW, 2.301.
19. *Gospel*, 87.
20. Swami Aseshananada, *Glimpses of a Great Soul* (Los Angeles: Vedanta Press, 1982), 124.
21. *Gospel*, 865.
22. Ibid., 247-8.
23. *Gita*, 4.39.
24. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), 107.

What Swami Vivekananda said is true: 'Devotion to God is dormant in everyone. It manifests itself when the veil of lust and gold is removed.' The attempt to remove that veil is sadhana, or spiritual discipline.

—Swami Turiyananda

Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The means to the realization of the three-footed (*tripāda*) Brahman (continued)

... भूतस्तेनैव मार्गेण स्वप्नस्थानं नियच्छति । जलूकाभाववद्व्यर्थकाममाजायतेश्वरत्वात् । तावतात्मानमान-
न्दयति । परसन्द्यि यदपरसन्द्यीति । ... ॥२॥

2. ... Again, through the same path, it [the illumined *jīva*, reaches the state called *turiya*-] *svapna* [that is, the state of dream while remaining merged in the fourth state of *turiya*, and there it] indeed gives [rest to itself].¹ [It is] just like the state of a leech [which moves from one position to another].² [This] desire arises from *iśvara* (God).³ By that, [the illumined *jīva*] enjoys bliss in his own Self.⁴ [The illumined sage] relinquishes the [idea of the] union of the Higher [Self] with the lower [for it implies a sense of differentiation before such union].⁵ ...

(To be continued)

Notes

1. The meaning of this statement is quite obscure. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin gives the following masterly exposition: Having thus experienced the state of *nirvikalpa* (absolute non-differentiation), free from the triad (*tripuṭi*) of knowledge-knower-known and the like, the illumined *jīva* once again reaches, through the same path [leading to *turiya*-*svapna*, a state of consciousness in which one sees and relates to things as if in dream, but all the while merged in the highest Consciousness called *turiya*] the state of *svapna* (literally, 'dream'). That is the state of *turiya*-*svapna*, where there is some semblance of duality characterized by *tripuṭi* in the form of ideations contained in the Great Sayings (*mahāvākyas*) such as *tattvamasi* ('That thou art') and *aham brahmāsmi* ('I am Brahman'), and which is of the essence of the ideations (that is, mind) taking the form of the Indivisible (that is, the Infinite) Brahman (*akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti-ātmaka-turiya*-*svapna*). There, in that state of *turiya*-*svapna*, he rests himself.

The above exposition by Upaniṣad Brahmayogin too is difficult to comprehend. One easy way to understand this unusual concept, rarely found in the other Upaniṣads, is to fall back upon the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, who said that there is a state *beyond* even the state of *nirvikalpa jñāna*, in which all duality or differentiation ceases absolutely, where one retains, as it were, a semblance of ego that is now thoroughly transformed into a God-centred and God-soaked form (compare *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti-ātmaka* mentioned above)—*pākā āmi*, or 'ripe ego', in Sri Ramakrishna's inimitable language—and transacts with the world of relativity as a special type of *jñāni*. This latter state he calls *vijñāna*, or special *jñāna*. (M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda [Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002], 103-5) Compare the two following statements by Swami Vivekananda: 'The world *is*, but not beautiful nor ugly, but as sensations without exciting any emotion'; '... things are seen and felt like shadows—without fear, without love, without emotion. Peace that one feels alone, surrounded with statues and pictures.' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997], 6.433) Swami Brahmananda says, 'Is there any limit to visions and experiences in the realm of the Spirit? The more you proceed, the more you feel that It is limitless, infinite. After having a vision of light or so, some people think that is the end; but it is not so. Others say that the *nirvikalpa* state, where all mental modifications cease, is the culmination of spiritual experience. Then again, there are others who say it is only the beginning.' (Translated from the

Bengali *Dharmaprasange Swami Brahmananda* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1961], 90)

2. Just as a leech moves from one clump of grass where it had settled to another clump, even so this illumined *jīva*, established in the state of *turiya-jāgarāṇa* (state of wakefulness in *turiya*), gives up that state by holding on to the state of *turiya-svapna* (state of dream in *turiya*). (Compare *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.3)
3. The meaning here appears rather obscure. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets this by saying that the desire or inclination to wander about in the three states (of waking, dream and deep sleep), which are markedly different from the *turiya* state, comes to the illumined *jīva* from God Himself. (Compare Sri Ramakrishna's statement that *after* attaining the highest state of God-absorption, or *nirvikalpa samādhi* (a supreme state of realization characterized by absolute non-differentiation), the illumined sage who is an *ādhikārīka puruṣa* (one commissioned by God to save humanity and belonging to the category of the Saviours of mankind, the Incarnations of God, or *avatāras*) *comes back*, as it were, to the state of relative consciousness—fully retaining his highest non-dual consciousness of absorption in Brahman—by the will of the Divine Mother or *īśvara*. According to Sri Ramakrishna, such an illumined sage, an *avatāra*, remains in the state of *bhāvamukha* (the threshold of the Infinite), the borderland between the Absolute and the relative, being commanded to remain so by *īśvara* Himself. (Compare Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda [Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2000], 439-47). This desire—if at all it could be termed a desire—to do good to the world, to save humanity from the bondage of ignorance, is implanted in the extremely pure (*śuddha sāttvika*) mind of such an illumined one by none other than *īśvara*.)
4. This statement, again, could be understood clearly in the light of the *bhāvamukha* state of consciousness spoken of in the preceding note—a concept that appears to have come into Indian spiritual and philosophical literature with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and the interpretation of his experiences by his intimate direct disciples. 'By that' could mean 'by means of staying in that *bhāvamukha* state', which, as stated earlier, is the junction between the Absolute and the relative, between the undifferentiated Whole and the differentiated manifestations that emerge from there. The idea could be that by living in that state of *bhāvamukha*, the Incarnation of God (or *avatāra*, Messiah, *Tathāgata*, *ādhikārīka puruṣa*—by whatever name he is called—this concept of a Saviour is common to all religious traditions of the world) has direct access to the Absolute and the Infinite (*nirvikalpaka* consciousness) as well as to the relative and the phenomenal (*savikalpaka* consciousness) simultaneously and delights in them both.

In his commentary on this statement, Upaniṣad Brahmayogin explains as follows: By means of that (state of consciousness), this one (illumined *jīva*) enjoys the bliss of his own Self through *savikalpaka* and *nirvikalpaka* states of *saṃādhi*.

5. The state of illumination or spiritual realization is often spoken of as the union of the *jīvātman* with the *paramātman*, the lower or inner Self (individual Consciousness) with the Higher Self (cosmic Consciousness). Even in such a union, there is a sense of differentiation: it implies the separateness of the individual and cosmic dimensions of Consciousness before union. Hence the illumined sage rejects such a concept. The import is as follows: It is *not* that the individual Self (*jīvātman*) gets united with the Cosmic Self (*paramātman*), but that there is just one unbroken, indivisible, homogenous mass of Consciousness (*akhaṇḍa-ekarasa-vijñānaghana-caitanya*) that *appears* to be two (*jīvātman* and *paramātman*) from an empirical point of view. It is the complete rejection of this empirical view by the illumined sage attuned to the highest Reality in the absolute (*pāramārthika*) sense that seems to be implied in this statement of the Upaniṣad.

One nice thing about egotists: they don't talk about other people.

Glimpses of Holy Lives

‘Whatever God Does Is for Our Own Good’

(Continued from the previous issue)

Uday was growing up in a distant city in happy circumstances. Meanwhile, his parents had to go through a long period of hardship.

‘Bhaktimān Yah Sa Me Priyah’

Their village suffered badly from drought and famine, and people perished of hunger and disease. Things came to such a pass that Girivar was obliged to sell all but his ancestral home and Gauri's jewellery in order to survive. Even so, it soon became clear that they had to choose between their own survival and the continuation of the daily worship of Krishna that they had been conducting at home ever since their marriage. For Girivar and Gauri, though, it was not a matter of choice: they sold up. Then, leaving the money with the village priest, to whom they entrusted the task of carrying on the worship, the couple left the village.

That night, as they slept under a tree in the forest, a venomous snake bit Gauri in the foot. As the poison coursed through her veins, Gauri writhed in agony. But there was nothing Girivar could do other than hold her in his arms helplessly; in the middle of that vast forest, it was impossible to save her. With super-human effort, Gauri struggled to subdue the pain and concentrate her mind on Krishna. Within a short time, however, she stopped breathing and lay motionless. Girivar passed the night chanting the name of God beside his wife's lifeless body. Next morning he consigned it to the waters of the Narmada. As he waded ashore, a sense of utter resignation came over Girivar, and he consoled himself: 'Whatever God does is for our own good.'

Girivar now had not a soul left in the

whole wide world he could call his own. Freed from every worldly tie, he became immersed in the depths of intense spiritual fervour, and his yearning for God grew by leaps and bounds.

One day his longing burst all restraint. Overpowered by an unspeakable restlessness and unable to bear the separation from Krishna any longer, he collapsed, unconscious. Suddenly he was transported to a realm of divine rapture. It was as if his surroundings had dramatically changed: the Narmada had transformed into the sacred Yamuna; the harsh, inhospitable forest had turned into the enchanting groves of Vrindaban—and before him stood the captivating form of Krishna with His soul-bewitching smile! Girivar gazed at the ravishing sight, transfixed; his heart was swimming in an ocean of bliss.

Then the Lord spoke: 'Girivar, you are exceedingly dear to Me. *I cannot live without you.* Come away with Me to the real Vrindaban. Gauri is not dead. She still has a suppressed desire to see her son. She will come to Me when her desire is fulfilled.'

Even as Girivar fell prostrate at the feet of his Chosen Ideal, his enthralled soul assumed the likeness of a beautiful, luminous cowherd boy and merged into the Lord. The mortal body bereft of the soul remained behind.

In Safe Hands

Helped by a mild current, Gauri's body floated down the river skirting the bank. After travelling a long distance, it finally came to rest in a mesh of overhanging branches. There it remained for nearly a week until a hermit who lived in a hut close by came upon it. He at

once observed that life still lurked in the body, or it would have started decomposing by then. Sprinkling some holy water potent with mantric power on Gauri, the hermit revived her and brought her to his hut.

After eating some fruits that the hermit gave her, Gauri felt refreshed; memory slowly returned and she remembered her husband. The hermit was an advanced soul: he seemed to know everything about her and Girivar. He related to her the story of Girivar's glorious end. Gauri thought: 'My husband was a genuine devotee. Had we remained together, perhaps, we might not have been able to give our undivided attention to God. Probably that was why God separated us. Indeed, whatever God does is for our own good.'

Yet, for all her rationalization, Gauri was sunk in deep dejection. Hoping to infuse some strength into her, the hermit spoke forcefully about the real nature of man and the immortality of the soul. Then he told her where she could find Girivar's remains. Gauri went to the spot accompanied by four brahmacharins, and with their help performed the funeral rites of her deceased husband.

Having spent a few days at the hermitage, Gauri thought it was time to move on. She had decided to begin a new life as an itinerant nun. With the hermit's blessings she donned ochre robes and left the place, surrendering herself to the dictates of destiny.

It All Happens for Good

Wandering from place to place, Gauri arrived at a city which appeared to be in a festive mood. Bunting and garlands decorated the streets and the air was alive with excitement. It happened to be King Chandrasen's capital. Just the day before, Chandrasen had abdicated as king and Prince Udayraj's coronation ceremony had taken place. Chandrasen had then taken monastic vows and departed to the forest.

But as Chandrasen's father's guru had foretold, on the night before his enthronement Udayraj saw his mother in a dream and came to know from her the events of his early life. Asked about it, the king divulged to him how he had been found adrift in the river. The disclosure shocked Udayraj. Then who were his real parents? Where were they? Were they alive? Had his mother become a nun? The mystery surrounding his past disturbed the prince profoundly.

The impact the dream had on Udayraj was too great to be ignored. What is more, a believer in omens and portents, he regarded the dream as a sign that something momentous was about to happen. Next day, after his foster-father had left for the forest, the prince instructed his commander-in-chief to deploy agents at all important locations in the city to look for an ochre-clad nun.

No sooner was Gauri spotted than the information came in. Udayraj was thrilled. Suspending his very first durbar, he rushed out of the palace. Delighted recognition lit up their faces as mother and son met. Udayraj gathered his mother in his arms and held her close; Gauri hugged her long-lost son tightly, crying, 'Uday, my son, my darling!'

At the palace, Gauri, though a nun now, was treated with the honour befitting a royal. Naturally, Udayraj wanted his mother to stay with him. But her husband's life had taught Gauri that all earthly relationships were obstacles on the spiritual path. Moreover, now that her one strong desire to see her son was satisfied, her heart longed for God alone.

So Udayraj had a modest cottage built for her outside the city and humbly requested his mother not to deprive him of the opportunity to serve her. Gauri spent the rest of her days there absorbed in prayer and worship. As her devotion matured, she too, like Girivar, was blessed with a vision of Krishna, uttering whose name she drew her last breath. *

It is harder to conceal ignorance than to acquire knowledge. —Arnold Glasgow



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Practice of Excellence. *N H Atthreya.*
MMC School of Management, PO Box
11269, III Floor, Court Chambers, New
Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020. 2003. 254
pp. Rs 240.

This book is about excellence at the workplace and in daily life. The author is the founder of an organization called Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence. This establishes his credentials for writing the book.

According to the author, excellence is of four kinds. The first kind benefits none, but may hurt some. The second kind benefits the individual practising excellence and possibly a few associates. The third kind benefits only a chosen few. The last kind benefits many people directly and several others indirectly. The book under review addresses itself to the fourth kind of excellence.

The book has an unusual format. Part of it is in the form of a dialogue, part contributed by other authors and the rest made up of quotations from various sources. It is divided into five sections. The first section contains seven chapters, of which six are in the form of a dialogue between the author and his daughter. The section commences with the study of the conventional understanding of excellence: being the best in one's pursuits. The second chapter is about human excellence, where a distinction is made between technical excellence in performance and the excellence displayed as a human being. This chapter in a way forms the main thesis of the book.

The third chapter talks of amalgamating human and technical excellence at the workplace, leading to greater efficiency in the corporate sector. The emphasis here is on the corporation itself rather than individuals. The fourth chapter, on the other hand, takes up the issue of how one can develop excellence in oneself. This is essential in the corporate sector because individual excellence is reflected in the performance of the organization itself.

At the level of management, one requires not only individual excellence but also the capacity to spot and encourage excellence in others. This is an important aspect of leadership: one is not only excellent, but knows how to encourage excellence in others. This aspect is dealt with in the fifth chapter.

The sixth chapter is about inner excellence, which is the highest level to which a human being can rise. This is where spirituality enters into the picture. Some examples of the spiritual dimension of inner excellence have been provided in the seventh chapter in the form of extensive quotations. The section then ends with a summing up, giving the essence of the practice of excellence.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 have been placed after Section 1, even though logically they should have been incorporated into Section 1 itself. Section 2, containing a Foreword, a Midword, an Afterword and an Eternal Word, should actually be read at the beginning of the book, after the third chapter, after the sixth chapter and at the end of the book respectively. Similarly, Section 3, containing the comments of Dan Butts, and Section 4, containing quotations, should actually be read along with the six chapters of Section 1. The way these sections have been separated from Section 1 makes it difficult for the reader to connect them.

Section 5 contains extracts from the booklet *The Call of Human Excellence* by Swami Ranganathananda, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1995. It is obvious that the author has been highly influenced by this booklet, as seen from the several references made to it throughout the book. The book closes with a very useful biographical list of people who have been quoted in the texts, and also a set of readings and references.

The overall impression one gets from reading the book is the importance given by the author to human excellence. However, the dialogic style adopted in Section 1, containing short sentences and hardly any disagreements, is not very conducive to focusing on specific issues. Therefore, one has to resort to the summing up towards the end of

the book. It would have added a lot of value to the book had the summing up been expanded and the dialogues shortened, especially since there is no disagreement between the interlocutors anywhere.

This book is highly topical. It raises a very important issue to which we Indians have to pay attention. For too long, we have been tolerating mediocrity and still hoping to make great strides. It is high time we heeded the words of the author and started encouraging excellence at all levels. The author should be thanked for raising these issues at the proper time.

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Swami Vivekananda and His Message of Vedanta. *C S Shah.* Swami Vivekananda Seva Sanstha, 29 Bhagya Nagar, Aurangabad 431 001. E-mail: drcessha_agd@sancharnet.in. 2003. xiv + 93 pp. Rs 50.

Swami Vivekananda's life has fascinated many scholars, inspiring them to write his biographies. The book under review captures the attention of its readers for its simplicity and tightly organized biographical material. It is written with charming simplicity coupled with a Vedantic background. The author himself explains in his preface the rationale behind writing this book: Swamiji's life helped him to get a better perception of spirituality, eternal Reality, Consciousness, human evolution and psycho-spiritual growth; hence his attempt.

This book presents Swamiji's life and work in such a lucid manner that one is compelled to finish reading it in a single sitting. It focuses on his childhood, meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, the teacher-disciple relationship, *shiva jnane jiva seva*—the mantra given by Sri Ramakrishna—Swamiji's pilgrimage across India as a wandering monk, his visits to America, Europe and England and their impact, implications of his speeches at the Parliament of Religions, return to India and his mahasamadhi. A full chapter is devoted to the philosophy of Vedanta as propounded by Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya. The Dvaitadvaita of Nimbarka and the Shuddhadvaita of Vallabhacharya are also mentioned. The chapter also includes the four yogas and emphasizes neo-Vedanta, the new meaning and practical thrust Swamiji gave to traditional Vedanta. Bringing out clearly the relevance of Swamiji's life, the last chapter shows how Vedanta preached by Swamiji, based on the life and teachings of his Master, can transform the consciousness of a spiritual aspirant from animal to human to divine levels. And, if practised sincerely, Swamiji's Vedanta can infuse purity of thought, faith in one's divine nature and endow one with the power to discriminate between the real and the unreal. This is growth and evolution, and to the evolved person, this world assumes a different dimension.

While to lay readers this book presents Swamiji and his message with rare conceptual clarity, to students of Vedanta it is provocative enough to induce them to further explore the intricacies of Swamiji's message. The author deserves thanks for his eloquent presentation of the life and message of Swamiji.

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Quest for Monism. *Swami Ramanujananda.* Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Thrissur 680 551. E-mail: srkmts@sancharnet.in. 2001. iv + 104 pp. Rs 35.

Quest for Absolutism: Panchadasi for Beginners. *Swami Ramanujananda.* Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur. 2002. viii + 215 pp. Rs 40.

Quest for Monism is an adaptation of the *Vivekachudamani*, a minor work by Adi Shankara. Obviously, it is more than 1200 years old. The mere fact that it has survived these many centuries indicates its vigour and its capacity to satisfy generations of truth seekers. It is an epitome of the acharya's Advaita philosophy, devoid of its pedantic arguments. It presupposes a readership from early sadhakas to spiritually advanced ones.

The *Panchadashi* by Vidyaranya is another *prakarana grantha* arranged in seventeen chapters, revealing various steps in spiritual sadhana. In both these books the author uses a question-answer method that makes the texts more lucid and pointed. Brevity is another hallmark of both these books.

Swami Vidyaranya, who composed the *Panchadashi*, was earlier at the helm of affairs at Vijayanagara and raised that empire to its highest glory. Later he joined the *acharya parampara* of Adi Shankara and was the pontiff of the Dakshinamnaya

Sringeri Sarada Peetham.

Taken together, both these books spell out Advaita Vedanta and stand as a beacon light to all those who desire to cross over the ocean of samsara. The chapters arranged by the author run parallel to the original Sanskrit texts and the number of stanzas also tallies with the original works. This is helpful to inquisitive readers.

The beauty of both these books lies in the formulation of questions on each stanza of the original texts. In his translation the author cites references to Vedic *ṛiks* and Upanishadic mantras. Both the books are shorn of verbosity, and their pithiness is striking. The author has done an excellent job of presenting Vedanta to modern seekers. More and more such books from the author would encourage young readership of serious Vedantic texts.

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Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram of Śrī Śaṅkārācārya. *Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati.*
DK Print World, Sri Kunj, F-52 Balinagar,
New Delhi 110 015. E-mail: dkprintworld@vsnl.net. 2002. xii + 164 pp. Rs 280.

It is said that Shankaracharya would have been known as a great poet-mystic if he had not written those marvelous commentaries on the *prasthāna-traya*, or the principal Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-gita* and the *Brahma Sutras*. The book under review is one of the most authoritative English commentaries and translations of his *Dakshinamurti Stotra*. Though there have been other commentaries on this work in Sanskrit, English and regional languages, this work is marked out by some distinctive features that fully justify its publication. The commentator has taken care to elaborately expound the theme of the verses, fully conforming to the original.

In its original Sanskrit, the *Stotra* has its own grandeur and beauty of expression. It would have remained a closed book for many Eastern and Western spiritual aspirants but for its various translations into English and regional languages.

The *Dakshinamurti Stotra* is a marvellous piece of poetry summing up Advaita philosophy in just nine verses. The central theme is the ideal of the non-dual Atman, which the vast Upanishadic liter-

ature expounds through *mahavakyas* like *tattvamasi* and *aham brahmāsmi*. The depth and intensity of those verses and their unique philosophical dimension would have been lost to the world had Shankara's disciple Sureshvara not revealed them in his *Manasollasa*.

Swami Tattvavidanandaji's exposition is quite comprehensive and convincing. His commentary on the first verse itself, where the world is compared to a city reflected on a mirror, is a good example. The analogy has been widely employed not only by the great Shankaracharya but also by such ancient masters like Abhinavagupta, the teacher of Kashmir Shaivism, and his grand-teacher Utpala. After presenting the Advaitic interpretation of the verse and asserting that the entire universe has its existence in the Atman, the commentator connects this supreme philosophical idea to the human situation: 'Vedanta is a vision which is given here and now. If you understand this, your samsara drops off. Vedanta is not a belief-system.' (37)

Especially while explaining Shankara's refutations of the Madhyamikas and Vijnanavadins, some post-Shankara Advaitins dwelt too much on *māyā-vāda*, thus creating the wrong notion that Shankara was primarily a *maya-vādin* rather than an *advaita-vādin*. Commentators and translators of the *Dakshinamurti Stotra* have often committed such errors, especially while dealing with verses 1, 2 and 5. The present commentary is remarkably free from such errors.

An important feature of the commentary is its extreme lucidity and directness in both style and approach. The tendency to resort to highly involved sentences, often unavoidable while translating Sanskrit classics into English, is scrupulously avoided. For instance, *maya* is described as 'name and form'. (13) To combine simplicity of style, directness of approach, dispassionate reasoning, thoroughness of treatment and a wealth of references in an English commentary on a Sanskrit classic is indeed a praiseworthy achievement. Of course, no commentary or translation can do full justice to Shankara's poetry or genius in making wonderful use of the sheer beauty of words and their inherent melody, or the sound-effects of his choicest expression.

The commentator has been careful not to add anything of his own while dealing with the original text. But there are a few lapses when he passes remarks on topics outside his realm. For example, he

seems to think that Shankara 'lived a couple of hundred years before Jesus, the Christ'. (79) Though there are still controversies regarding the period of Shankara's life, the generally accepted period is 788-820 AD (though there is a view that he lived in the second century BC, it is not recognized by historians). One can, however, neglect such minor lapses, as they do not directly interfere with the work as a whole.

It is neither possible nor necessary to analyse the author's translation and commentary on all the nine verses. The work is bound to enrich and widen the devotee's horizon in its own way. Swami Tattvavidanandaji deserves our gratitude and congratulations for his contribution to the study and propagation of Sri Shankara's works.

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Vastu: Relevance to Modern Times. *B Niranjan Babu*. UBS Publishers' Distributors, 5 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 002. 2001. xlivi+224 pp. Rs 195.

According to the author, ancient Indians felt that *Vastu* could create contentment in one's life within a framework defined by our astrological charts. He has tried to show in his own way how *Vastu* principles can be used in houses, hospitals, industries, temples and landscapes. In a span of sixteen chapters covering about two hundred pages, he has combined rhetoric with actual application to exhort the layperson to accept the age-old Indian principles of *Vastu* and apply them in modern life.

In the Introduction, a short history of *Vastu* along with its relation to astrology, energy fields and the like tries to prove the greatness of our ancient culture. Some principles of *Vastu*, like its relation to the *Pancha-mahabutas*, *jyotisha muhurta* and the types of architects, are informative.

The second chapter, on *Vastu*'s interface with astrology, is disappointing, as it does not get into the depth of the subject. The third, on temple architecture, while rightly saying that the subject is encyclopaedic, does not attempt any detailing of temple plans or construction. The next chapter, on orientation, is about the ancient way of using a *shanku* (gnomon) to establish the cardinal points of the site.

The fifth chapter is on *mandalas*, or basic ground plan configurations or grids, and makes interesting reading for architects. It considers the site and building to be an organism living in harmony with cosmic principles. The sixth chapter deals with four of ten basic house models with the help of ten-line grids and clear diagrams. However, the other six models mentioned are not explained. The seventh chapter, on doors and house sizes, contains extensive tables suggesting different breadths and heights. The tables need to be given captions in order to make them clearer. The next chapter, on home interiors, explains the distribution of furniture and equipment, fixtures like mirrors, and indoor gardening according to *Vastu* principles. The ninth chapter gives a few helpful hints to expectant mothers. It cautions them against using certain areas in the house, like the south-east corner, where the energy play is higher. The tenth chapter deals with domestic happiness and provides practical suggestions (explained with figures) as to how the house can be used by family members for their different purposes. The eleventh chapter, on health, focuses on the Ayurvedic principles of *tri-dosha* and the different ailments for which Ayurveda has remedies. The next two chapters are on hospital and industrial complexes and discuss site locations and room layouts in detail. The following two chapters give suggestions regarding gardens and street layouts; curious readers will find them informative. The last chapter contains plans for residences and one for a dental clinic.

The book could have dwelt less on the glorification of ancient Indians. There are also some avoidable repetitions. Some illustrations have no captions and a few more are confusing. Moreover, when *Vastu* principles are quoted, it is useful to give detailed reference to sources; the book does so only in some cases.

In general, the reader gets the feeling that, according to the author, there are only a few *Vastu* principles (like the *Vastu-purusha-mandala* and the use of north and east as important directions), which are applied in various ways in modern life, where limitations are many.

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A book is a success when people who haven't read it pretend they have.

Reports

Celebrated. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary; by Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, and the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington DC; in July 2004. Swamis of the Fiji centre gave talks at various schools and colleges and organized a procession with decorated floats, while the programme at the Washington centre included talks, discussions, an inter-faith event, a 2-day women's retreat, a play, an exhibition and the publication of a booklet.

Participated. Swami Adiswaranandaji, head of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York; in an all-day conference on 'Unlearning Intolerance'; at the United Nations, New York; on 21 July.

The swami was invited to join a number of distinguished participants in speaking on the subject of 'Education for Tolerance and Understanding'. Attending the conference were more than 500 specially invited persons representing various delegations and departments of the UN, non-governmental organizations associated with the UN and delegates from other organizations specifically interested in the area of combating intolerance of every kind. The conference was convened by Mr Shashi Tharoor, UN Undersecretary General for Communications and Public Information.

The conference was opened by UN Secretary General Mr Kofi Annan, followed by a keynote address by Nobel Peace Prize-laureate Elie Wiesel.

Then, as moderator of the programme, Mr Tharoor introduced each of the distinguished participants, who presented their remarks on the subject of 'Unlearning Intolerance'.

Some of the other participants in the conference were Edgar Bronfman, President of the World Jewish Congress; Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-defamation League; Sister Ruth Lott, OP, Sisters of St Dominic of Amityville; Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, President of the American Sufi Muslim Association; Anne Bayefsky, Adjunct Professor, Columbia University School of Law; Ephraim Isaac, Director of the Institute of Semitic Studies, Princeton University; Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis; James H Charlesworth, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Princeton Theological Seminary; Mark Weitzman, Director of the Task Force Against Hate of the Simon Weisenthal Center; and Malcolm



Swami Adiswaranandaji at the UN Conference on Unlearning Intolerance



Distribution of foodstuff

Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The conference was also simultaneously webcast over the Internet by the UN. The complete conference will remain available on the website archives of the UN (www.un.org/webcast/2004/html).

On the day following the conference, Swami Adiswaranandaji and three other participants were invited to appear for an interview on *The Charlie Rose Show*, a popular, nation-wide news interview programme of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), to discuss the UN conference and some of its highlights. Participating with the swami on the programme were Elie Wiesel, Abraham Foxman and Edward Mortimer, Advisor to the Secretary General of the UN.

Distributed. 200 saris, 200 lungis, 400 ORS packets, rice, dal, salt and candles; by Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Sylhet, Bangladesh; to 200 flood-affected families of Companyganj, Sylhet; in July. The centre also served cooked food to 700 families for 2 days.

Launched. Relief work in the wake of the recent devastating floods in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal; by the Ramakrishna Mission; in July. Branch centres involved in the work distributed foodstuffs and provided medical aid to the victims. Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Silchar, distributed rice, dal and salt among 1165 families and treated 2964 patients in Silchar town. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati, supplied flattened rice and jaggery to 400 families in Jagiroad (Morigaon District) and Amingaon, Kamalpur,

Sonapur and Khetri (Kamrup District), provided cleaning and purifying agents and treated 1600 patients. Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj, distributed rice, dal and oil to 1509 people of Deopur (Karimganj District); it also gave medical aid to 170 patients. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, distributed flattened rice and jaggery to 9015 families in 185 villages across Warisnagar, Khanpur and Kalyanpur (Samastipur District), Hayaghat (Darbhanga District) and Basopatti (Madhuvani District). Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur, distributed flattened rice, jaggery, salt, candles and matches among 4030 families of Musahari, Fatehpur, Motipur and Sakra (Muzaffarpur and Vaishali Districts). Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar, treated 1000 patients in nearby villages. Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar, in addition to distributing flattened rice to 3725 people of Tufanganj, served cooked food to 454 families for 5 days and treated 721 patients. The total number of Halazone tablets given away by the above-mentioned centres was 10,90,000. *

Mincing your words makes it easier if you have to eat them later.